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We Dropped the A-Bomb

We Dropped the A-Bomb

by

MERLE MILLER

and

ABE SPITZER

THOMAS Y. CROWELL COMPANY
NEW YORK

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To the Crew of *The Great Artiste:*

SWEENEY

◆

ALBURY

◆

VAN PELT

◆

OLIVI

◆

BEAHAN

◆

"NAILS"

◆

"BUCK"

◆

RAY

◆

"PAPPY"

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PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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1-12-52

Introduction

None of us knew for sure what the "gimmick" was, not even after the fire and smoke rolled up toward us from Hiroshima and it looked as if the sun had fallen out of the sky and was on the ground. Not until a few minutes later when we had broken away from the danger zone and Colonel Paul W. Tibbets, our group commander and pilot of the B-29 that let go with the first bomb, said over the radio, "Well, boys, you have just dropped the first atomic bomb in history."

Even then it didn't sink in. I didn't know what an atomic bomb was or what it had done to the city of Hiroshima below or what a far worse bomb would do a few days later when we let it go over Nagasaki.

For me, the experience was a little like when we got in the war. That Sunday afternoon in December I was at the Polo Grounds watching a football game between Brooklyn and the Giants. During the game, over the loudspeaker, the announcer, every few minutes, kept asking Army officers to report to their posts. And all over the stadium men in uniform would rise, a worried look on their faces, and hurry away. I knew something was wrong, but I never suspected that it was war. And when, on the bus on the way home, I heard somebody say that Pearl Harbor had been bombed, it still didn't mean much to me. I didn't know where or what Pearl Harbor was. After I got home, my wife Esta and I looked it up on the globe on top of the bookcase in our living room. But actually, I wasn't really convinced that we were in the war until the next morning when we listened to President Roosevelt's speech on the radio.

As far as the "gimmick" was concerned, it was weeks —even months—before I realized that on August 6, 1945, I had been part of a handful of men who'd unleashed a force that could—and may—destroy most of the people of the world and civilization itself, that might do more damage in an unrecorded split second of time than all the raids of all the bombers of all the nations in all the theaters of war since early September 1939. I know that now, and it frightens me.

Of course, I'd known our crew was in on something new and big since October 1944. I don't remember what day of the week it was—or even what day of the month. You don't pay much attention to things like that in the Army. All I knew was that Major Sweeney, our CO, called me in, and I saluted and kept wondering if I was going to be taken off my flying status and hoping not because it had been hard enough to get a waiver in the first place—because of my bad eyes.

The Major asked me to sit down; then he paused, a little dramatically, and said, "Abe, I thought you ought to know that this big thing we're testing is pretty important. If it's successful, the war will be shortened by at least six months, maybe more.". . . He hesitated again. "And the chances are we'll be going overseas."

Actually, I don't think I believed him. I mean I couldn't imagine a bomb that would be as successful as he'd indicated. Besides, I'd heard so much talk for so long about how bombing alone would win the war in Europe, but our troops had still had to make an infantry landing on the Normandy coast.

But I did realize I was in on the ground floor of something pretty important, and I was glad.

But it wasn't until the Japs sued for peace that I knew we really had shortened the war by six months or more with our "gimmick." And it wasn't for about two weeks, when I began seeing the photos of the atomic bomb damage at Hiroshima and Nagasaki and began reading the newspaper accounts of what those two bombs had done that I realized what kind of history we'd made.

And I did a lot of thinking between then and the time I got out of the Army.

That's why, now, I spend most of my spare time making speeches, trying to tell people the atomic bomb has made another war impossible, that if we have one every city in the world may be wiped out, including New York, including my home and thousands of other homes in the Bronx and everywhere else in this country.

Lots of times people don't believe me, and there are a lot of people I haven't talked to yet—and won't ever have time to talk to. And some of those are the people who right now, every day, are talking about us getting ready for another war.

It's for them, especially them, that this book has been written, to tell them exactly what it was like over Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And what the A-bomb means.

Chapter One

THE sun was beating down on the tin roof of our Quonset hut, and we were sitting on our bunks or lying on them, not talking much, most of us not wearing anything but our "shorts"—our issue khaki trousers cut off about six inches below the crotch. In one corner was a poker game, not a very interesting one; it was August 4, and most of our gambling money for the month was already won or lost. A couple of men were shooting craps, playing for pennies and nickels, and there were maybe one or two who were reading those pocket books the Army gives you, mystery stories, I suppose; that's about all most of us ever read.

Most of the men in our crew were just stretched out on their sacks; it was the middle of the afternoon, and, as always, it was unbelievably hot. There was "Nails" Kuharek, Master Sergeant John D. on the records, our engineer and a Regular Army man who never could quite get used to or approve of us "duration and six" men. "Nails"—we called him that because he was tough and never had much to say and said that short and sharp—had his eyes closed, but he wasn't asleep. I knew that because once or twice he'd looked over at me and opened his mouth as if he were going to say something; then he'd seemed a little disappointed because no words came out, and he'd changed his mind and shut his eyes again.

Next to Kuharek was "Buck," Staff Sergeant Ed Buckley, sometimes called "Muscles" because, as we told him, if he ever got out of a job a carnival would always take him on as a thin man. "Buck" was our radar operator, and I don't know what he was thinking about unless maybe it was the greyhounds he used to raise and race back home in Lisbon, Ohio, and his harness horses; he'd studied to be a veterinarian at Ohio State and, later, at the University of Pittsburgh, and he loved animals and didn't care much about airplanes.

"I can't see why in hell anybody'd go around in one of these things when he could be riding horseback," he used to say. "Besides, I don't think the airplane's here to stay; I hope not anyway." And he meant it, too. Or maybe he was thinking about his son, who was only a year old, or the fact that he was actually too old to fly; he was 32. Of course, at times I used to think the same thing about myself. I'm 34 now; I was 33 then.

Then there was Al Dehart, who was "Pappy" to all of us, especially the kids in the outfit. He had two kids back in Plainview, Texas, and was our tailgunner. He was a silent, lonely kind of guy, and he had a lonely job. A tailgunner is all by himself on a B-29, with hours of unbroken solitude, but "Pappy" didn't mind. "It gives me time to think," he used to say, "and I've got a lot on my mind." "Pappy" had a birthday coming up, and he may have been wondering about that, although he couldn't have known then on what an historic day it would fall. He would be thirty on August 8. The three of us—Buck, Pappy, and I—sometimes called ourselves "The Three Old Bastards." As you can see, ours wasn't a crew of kids.

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Ray Gallagher, the assistant flight engineer and my best friend, was the youngest; he was only 23. Ray had been having a fitful afternoon nap, and a few minutes before he had awakened with a kind of start. I could tell he had been having a bad dream.

"What time is it?" he wanted to know.

"About two-thirty," I said.

"Still P.M.?" he questioned.

"Still P.M."

"Won't be long now, will it?"

"Nope. We'll have to get dressed in about five minutes."

"Think it'll be tonight, Abe?"

"Maybe," I answered, inadequately. "You never can tell."

"Ah," said Buckley, and there was disgust in his voice. "It probably won't be for weeks yet. You know the Army. Hurry up and wait."

"But the way they talked yesterday—" Ray began.

"The way they talked yesterday, we're going to drop an honest-to-God 'gimmick' on the Nips," said Buckley. "Sometime. Maybe. If nothing happens. And when we drop it, all hell is going to break loose. If it works. Probably."

Kuharek raised up on his elbow. "I don't think we ought to talk about it," he said, glancing around him somewhat nervously. "You know what they said."

A soldier from another crew who was lying nude on his bunk raised up and glared at us. "Why don't you guys pipe the hell down?" he wanted to know. We did.

The day before we had had a briefing at which we had been told that our crew would be one of the few to go on a mission which would drop the first "gimmick"

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in history on Japan. That was supposed to be great news, but it wasn't. We'd known it for months, since the October before in most cases, when, at Wendover Field, Utah, Colonel Paul W. Tibbets, the group commander, had told us that the thing we called the "gimmick" would some day be the "real thing"; exactly what the "real thing" was he hadn't said, but it was obviously a new kind of bomb, and it was obviously going to be powerful, and obviously nothing could go wrong when we actually dropped one—we hoped. And ever since January 7—eight months before—there was no longer any doubt of it; we were one of the few teams that would do the job. January 7 was the day I was transferred to the 393rd Bomb Squadron.

So it wasn't news at all. There'd been too many dry runs both back in the States and since we got to our base on Tinian, six thousand miles from San Francisco but not far from Saipan and just a fairly pleasant flight from the Japanese Empire.

The day before we'd also been told that as soon as our super-duper egg was dropped over the Empire, Washington would release the news and we'd know what the secret was (along with everybody else in the world). What's more, that we'd all be famous—IF it worked and IF, of course, we got back alive. Nobody mentioned the two "ifs" but we were all aware of them.

After our briefing, we'd been warned to keep absolutely quiet and had had our pictures taken and filled out long mimeographed forms giving our entire life history, for the newspapers, they said.

"Even the *Bronx Home News?*" I'd asked.

"Yeah," Major Moynahan, the public relations officer, had laughed. "Even the Bronx'll know about this one."

After that, we'd voted on the name for our ship, and the *Great Artiste* had won. The *Great Artiste* for Captain Kermit K. Beahan, who was popular with the girls wherever he went. And with us. I was disappointed with the vote. Not that I said anything, but ever since May when we'd picked up B-29 Number 42-7353 at Omaha, Nebraska, it'd been *My Baby Doll* to me, for my wife Esta.

After the briefing the afternoon before, we'd wandered over toward the air field. I'd been going to check on the radio, just for the hell of it, but there was an MP standing by the plane, and he was armed. Then I was sure of it. There was a "gimmick" somewhere around; it wasn't just playing any more, no more getting ready. And we wouldn't have to guess much longer. There were a couple of civilian scientists around the plane too and not far away the mysterious building which was always guarded, day and night, and which no one but the scientists ever entered—except maybe a general or so.

I wanted to rush up to one of the scientists and say, "What's cooking, chum?" And, too, I wondered what the hell scientists had to do with bombing missions anyway and why about 25 of them had arrived at Tinian a couple of weeks before and seemed to be working about 24 hours a day in that guarded building or in one of the also-guarded Quonset huts nearby.

But I didn't say anything, and we all turned away from the plane, a little disappointed.

"Maybe they're installing plush seats," said Ray.

"Or modern plumbing," Buckley added. The MP didn't reply; he didn't even smile.

That night I hadn't been able to sleep much. We'd had a few beers. It was still near enough to the first of the month for that. There weren't many; there never were. But we still had part of a bottle of whiskey that the officers of the crew had given us. We'd sat around in our quarters and drunk and played a game of poker and tried to talk. But nobody had much to say. All of us were a little low.

I kept remembering how I'd felt in June when we'd flown over the Golden Gate, and I'd looked down at it and thought to myself, "Better take a good gander, Spitzer. You'll probably never see it again." Then I'd wished that I'd never kicked up so much fuss about getting on flying status; I could have stayed on the ground and kept my mouth shut. After all, I had weak eyes, and I wasn't supposed to fly, but I'd pestered Colonel Tibbets and Major Sweeney, our CO, so much that they finally said, "Okay, we'll try to get you a waiver."

And they had. Ray Gallagher was flying on a waiver, too. I'd never complain, of course, and actually I was glad, but every once in a while I'd say what you do say to yourself in the Army, if you're a combat soldier, that is: "It's better to be a live coward than a dead hero."

I didn't know what the "thing" we were going to drop was; okay, so it was just a better, more destructive bomb, but nothing like it had ever been used before, and regular bombs are bad enough, and it was a sure thing that nobody was exactly sure what would happen when we let this one go.

After all, I kept thinking, wars are for young men, especially aerial warfare; most of the men in the outfit were practically young enough to be kids of mine—or at least very much younger brothers; and when you're over thirty, you tire easily, getting up at 6:30, finishing after dark, trying to keep up with high school kids.

Hell, this was no war for me. This was no war for anybody with sense.

Thoughts like these had kept recurring all night, and I'd tossed and turned and sweated, along with the rest.

Toward morning, I'd reached under my pillow, got my wallet and pulled out my wife's picture. I couldn't see a thing, of course, but it made me feel better just to have her picture in my hand.

A little while after that I'd fallen asleep, and it must have been about an hour and a half later when I'd been awakened. It was 6:30, and I wanted to make chow because we were going to have honest-to-God fried eggs instead of the usual powdered. Besides, it was Saturday, and there was an inspection, and, anyway, I couldn't have gone back to sleep; we were going to have a briefing at 1500, at 3 P.M., and then we'd know the secret.

The briefing had been on my mind all day. There hadn't been much to do. First off, we'd failed the inspection. Ray or "Pappy" or somebody had six dust spots under his bunk, and somebody's shoes weren't properly shined. Okay, I'd thought, fine, wonderful. Gig us. Don't give us our three-day passes, not even an overnight pass for us kids; we're bad; restrict us to quarters, even. Fine. Wonderful. Great. Of course, we won't be able to go on the mission; too bad. We'll have to call the mission off—or send somebody else, but that's okay. Our hut had six spots of dust, and somebody forgot to shine his shoes.

After lunch, as I said, I'd tried to rest for a while, but it wasn't much use. The time for the briefing had crept closer, as such things do.

"You guys really talk too much," the soldier on the other bunk repeated. "Try buttoning your lips."

I looked up to answer him. None of us had said a

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word for perhaps five minutes. But then I glanced at my watch; it was exactly 2:45.

I sat up and reached for my shirt, such as it was. I'd cut the sleeves off above the elbows, and it was dirty besides; it was impossible to keep clean on Tinian.

"Ray," I said. He looked as if he were asleep again. "Ray, we'd better get ready." He sat up instantly. I should have known better; he hadn't been asleep.

Then a corporal from headquarters stuck his head in the door.

"All right, you Victory Boys," he said. "Off and on. Let's get on the beam. You've got to be at the combat room at 1500. Extra special briefing for you Victory Boys." He smirked when he said the words "extra special." He was joking, I guess, but the way I felt right then I could have jumped up and smashed his face in. Ever since we'd arrived on the island, they'd called us that, the men in all the other squadrons. We were the "Victory Boys" or "Glory Boys" or the "Errol Flynns" or the "Guys Who're Going to Win the War for Us."

In the supply room they were almost always fresh-out of whatever we wanted, if they knew who we were. There was plenty of everything for everybody except us, the men of the 393rd. And even on the hot coral roads, jeeps would pass us and the men in them would jeer, "Yah, you Victory Boys. Try getting a few blisters on your feet instead of your you-know-where." Only their language was somewhat more colorful than that. We were probably the most unpopular squadron on the island.

You couldn't blame the other men, of course. When our ground crews had arrived at Tinian in May, about a month before those of us in the air echelon, they'd told everybody, "Wait until our guys get here; they're going to end the war in a hurry. They've got something brand new that'll finish off the Japs overnight. You guys might as well go home."

This to men who'd been flying in 600—and 1,000—bomber raids over the Jap homeland and the occupied islands for weeks and months, men who had up to 35 missions and beyond, men who'd seen their buddies shot down and killed—or taken prisoner, which was worse—men who'd bombed Europe, too, and some from the China-Burma-India theater. You really couldn't blame them for being bitter.

The corporal shouted again. "All right, off your butts. You guys do more sack time than all the rest of the squadrons put together." I couldn't help wondering if the corporal had ever been in a plane at all, even on a sightseeing tour.

We were all up now, and we didn't have much time to get to the combat room, but nobody hurried much. We all seemed to be taking our time, as if every minute we delayed now could put off the inevitable that much longer.

When we walked out of our Quonset, we all turned around and looked longingly back at our rumpled bunks —our "sacks."

"Hope we get a little more sack time," said "Pappy" Dehart.

The rest of us—Kuharek, Buckley, Ray Gallagher and I—nodded.

Then we started for the combat room, walking as slow as we could. We'd be late, maybe, but that was all right. They'd wait for us. And the briefing would be one we'd never forget. It would be one for the books all right, the history books.

Chapter Two

THERE was a guard at the door of the combat room, and he checked each of our names before he let us inside.

"We aren't Japs," Ray cracked. "Can't you tell? We're on your side. Remember?" Most MPs would have grinned and cracked back, but this one must have had strict orders; he didn't. He just motioned us inside, one by one.

The long low room was already filled with cigarette smoke, and it was hot, the kind of enervating, tropical heat that's unknown back in the States. This was the time of day when the natives on Tinian, who were wiser than we in such matters, refused to do any work at all. A *siesta,* they figured, was the only proper activity for an hour of the day when it was so hot just breathing was difficult. We found places on the hard benches, and I winked at Major Sweeney, our commander; Captain Van Pelt, the navigator, Captain Albury, our pilot; Lieutenant Olivi, the co-pilot, and Captain Beahan. Captain Beahan winked back at us and grinned, and the rest nodded, rather grimly, I thought. There were five other crews in the room besides ourselves, and, although the briefing hadn't started yet, no one was talking; there was just a little, almost inaudible whispering among some of the brass who were sitting up front, including a couple of Navy two-stars and some high-ranking Army officers, none of whom I knew well enough to wink at or nod to; high brass is funny that way.

After we were seated, the Navy officer who had designed the bomb, a tight-lipped, balding captain from Chicago, William S. Parsons, rose. He cleared his throat several times and shuffled the papers in his hands, then took out a handkerchief and wiped his forehead before he began speaking. It was so quiet in the room that we could hear a jeep shifting gears somewhere outside and the motors of the planes, although that last was nothing new; there were very few minutes during the 24 hours of the day when you couldn't hear that.

"I guess you men know why you are here," the captain began, speaking slowly and very softly. Some of us nodded emphatically; we all knew.

"The bomb you are going to drop," the captain continued, "is something new in the history of warfare. It will be the most destructive weapon ever devised." (I wished he'd get to the point; we knew all that. When would we drop it? That was what we wanted to know.) "We think"—and here he paused and cleared his throat again—"We think it will wipe out almost everything within a three-mile area, maybe slightly more, maybe somewhat less."

Parsons hesitated, then again took out his handkerchief and wiped the sweat off his forehead. We could still hear the motor of that jeep, and it seemed so loud you would almost have sworn it was in the room.

"One bomb," the captain said, "one single solitary bomb will do all that. And maybe more."

I didn't have a handkerchief on me, but I could have used one; the perspiration was dripping off my forehead and falling on my shirt. Not that it would have been noticed there; my shirt was wet, too; my whole body was as wet as if I'd just stepped out of a shower.

"For more than three years," Captain Parsons went on, "scientists from all over the United States have been working on this instrument of destruction; the experiments that have been conducted have cost hundreds of millions of dollars, and tens of thousands of workers have been employed to make only a few of these bombs." He stopped again. "After all," he added, "it won't take many." He laughed weakly, and so did a few others, none of them very heartily.

"On July 16," he continued, "in a remote section of New Mexico, one bomb was exploded from a steel tower. A not very tall steel tower. The flash of the explosion was seen for more than ten miles; a soldier 10,000 feet away was knocked off his feet; another soldier more than five miles away was temporarily blinded; a girl in a town many miles off who had been blind all her life saw a flash of light; several cows in nearby farms turned half-white.

"For those of us who were there," he went on, his voice monotonous, half-sleepy, "it was the beginning of a new age. I can't say more than that now, but later you'll understand."

He stopped again, and a Naval officer—an admiral, as I remember—who was sitting up front dropped a cigarette he'd been holding in his mouth and trying to light. The officer crushed the unsmoked cigarette under his foot and took out another but didn't light it either. His hand was shaking, and his lips trembled.

When Captain Parsons went on, his voice had dropped to what was almost a whisper, and we had to strain to hear him.

"No one knows," he said, "exactly what will or may happen when the bomb is dropped from the air; obviously, that has never been done before." His face, too, was very white, but no one took particular notice. I doubt if there was anyone in the room who wasn't pale.

He hesitated for a very long time, a full moment, I'd guess. Then, "I believe that's all," he said—and sat down, mopping his forehead again. His handkerchief was getting grimy, although it had been white and clean at first. I felt like applauding or something. The room was so damned quiet, and it had been a great speech. At that moment I couldn't have told you a word he said but I knew it had been a really terrific speech. He hadn't talked long but he'd said enough; he'd said plenty.

I looked at my wrist watch; it was only 3:20, but I'd personally have sworn we'd been there an hour already; I even put the watch to my ear to see if it were still running.

It was.

After that, we listened to some of the scientists. I'd seen some of them around the place for days now and thought they were GIs; they were almost all very young, in their twenties. We'd even guessed that a couple of the huskier ones were FBI men, nosing around to check up on security, just as the men at Wendover Field in Utah had thought that about us when we first got there, and for the same reason, because there was something mysterious about us.

Well, the mystery was unravelling now, little by little, like the clues in a very-well written murder story; only we didn't know yet who the victim would be. The briefing continued for more than two hours, the scientists telling us, still without revealing exactly what the bomb was, some of the technical details about how it was to be carried (although we already knew that, too; to discover that had been the purpose of our dry-runs), how fast and from what altitudes it would be dropped and so on. The details of all this are still "top secret" even though the war's over. Why I don't know. We're not fighting anybody now—or planning to, as far as I know. Maybe the brass in Washington know the answer to that one.

Again and again that afternoon we were warned that all the information they were giving us was "top secret," "extremely confidential," that we must not even discuss it among ourselves, that we were the "hottest" crews in the U. S. Army Air Forces and that the enemy was extra-curious about the bombs, partly because, we were told, Germany had been trying to make the same kind of bombs when the war ended—and, the scientists seemed to think, had very nearly succeeded.

After the scientists had finished, a G-2 officer explained what everybody had already guessed long before, that Colonel Tibbets, group commander, would pilot the ship that dropped the first bomb. (We later found out that Parsons, Tibbets and Major Thomas W. Ferebee, the bombardier on Tibbets' plane, were the only three men on the mission who knew exactly what we were carrying.) Tibbets would fly his own ship, the *Enola Gay,* named after his mother.

The colonel, a short, rather muscular, easy-going man with a boyish smile, got up next. He didn't have to tell us why he had been chosen. All of us knew that he'd been in the Air Corps since 1937, that he'd been with the Eighth Air Force in England, that he'd piloted one of the first B-17s to bomb Germany, that he'd flown

Generals Mark Clark and Dwight Eisenhower to the conferences that preceded the North African invasion, and that he'd been one of the first pilots to fly the experimental models of the B-29, what's more, that General "Hap" Arnold had once called him "the best damned pilot in the Air Force."

The colonel began by saying that whatever any of us, including himself, had done before was small potatoes compared to what we were going to do now. Then he said the usual things, but he said them well, as if he meant them, about how proud he was to have been associated with us, about how high our morale had been and how difficult it was not knowing what we were doing, thinking maybe we were wasting our time and that the "gimmick" was just somebody's wild dream. He was personally honored, and he was sure all of us were, to have been chosen to take part in this raid which, he said—and all the other big-wigs nodded when he said it—would shorten the war by six months.

"At least six months," he added emphatically. And you got the feeling that he really thought this bomb would end the war, period.

When Tibbets had finished, the G-2 officer rose again, and before he started he glanced at Major Sweeney, then at us and smiled. I'd always rather liked him before, but right then I hated his guts; I wished he hadn't smiled. Our ship, he said, would fly right wing to Tibbets to drop instruments and make records. Three scientists would be aboard. Major Sweeney would pilot the ship himself; Captain Albury would act as co-pilot. Lieutenant Olivi wouldn't be able to go along because there wouldn't be room.

Well, there we were. I'd known it was coming, almost exactly what was coming, but when I heard it and

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it was certain, once and for all, I began sweating again.

A third ship, the G-2 officer added, would fly on Tibbets' left wing to take pictures.

And that was all, brother. No 1,000-plane raids; no "massed aerial armadas," or "bombers blanketing the skies" such as we'd been reading about in the newspapers and seeing take off from our own base. No "swarms of fighter protection" either, in fact, no fighter protection at all. Just three B-29s over the Empire with two 50-caliber machine guns in the tail of each, plus the most powerful bomb ever along for company—and for the Japs.

"Maybe they think the Japs'll be away on a fishing trip," Ray whispered to me, and I tried to smile. Instead, I giggled foolishly, and several people turned around to stare at me nervously, as if they thought I'd gone off my nut. And right then I wouldn't have given any affidavits that I hadn't—or mightn't at any moment.

An hour before our take-off, the intelligence officer told us, three ships would take off, one to go over each of the possible targets, to make weather observations. They would relay their reports back to Tinian, not to us on the strike ships. We, then, were to monitor the same frequency, decode the reports and inform the pilot over which target the weather was most favorable. I say "we" were to do all that; I really mean I was. As radio operator on the *Great Artiste*, that responsibility was on my shoulders, and I wished it weren't. I'd have traded places with practically anybody at that moment except maybe almost any Jap who lived anywhere near where our target was. It was too much for me. Why hadn't I stayed on the ground? My mother had always told me that if God had intended that men fly, he would have given us wings, and

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there wasn't much doubt in my mind but that she was perfectly right.

Besides, just to make my job tougher, there was to be no interplane communication. The radio operator—that's me—was to make sure he got the message that the weather ships relayed to the ground station at our base and make no break in the radio silence. Absolutely. Unequivocally. And without question, said the G-2 brass.

Ray patted me on the back playfully. "Up to you, boy," he said. "It's all up to you, Abe boy." This time I didn't try to smile at him. I just stared straight ahead, keeping my eyes on Major Sweeney. The major tried to look unconcerned, but not very successfully. Irishmen, in general, I've found, have a hell of a time covering up their feelings. Sure, he was a good pilot; Tibbets had chosen him for the mission and for our squadron because he was one of the best, and he had about 3,000 hours in the air with no accidents, not even minor ones; he wasn't a newcomer to the game, and he was as dependable as a commercial air lines pilot. Still, the back of his shirt was dark with sweat, too. And Beahan, who had flown 12 missions in Europe and 19 in North Africa, who'd been shot down twice in the enemy's front yard in the European Theater and in the Mediterranean, who had a Purple Heart and a cluster and God knows how many other medals, had his lips pursed as if he were whistling. Only no sound came out.

"Just a couple things more," the intelligence officer continued. "One ship will fly to Iwo Jima and stand by in case one of the three strike ships has to abort. . . . And, oh, yes, the group identity on the tail of your ships will be replaced, and you will not be allowed to carry

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the name of your ship; that will be replaced by a number, and your call letters will be changed. . . . Just in case . . . In case anything happens, I mean." . . . And he paused. "We can't take any chances, any chances at all."

Just in case of what? I wanted to shout. What the hell do you mean, just in case anything happens. Explain yourself, sir, and be damned quick about it. What will happen? To whom and when and for what purpose? A few simple, meaningful, all-important, explanatory words will do. But, please God, those words. And now and quick.

Naturally, as always, I said nothing. You never do at a time like that.

That was all except that Captain Parsons repeated the security warnings, and so did Colonel Tibbets, and so did the G-2 officers.

"You're hot," they said. "You're the hottest crews in the U. S. Air Forces. No talking. No talking to anyone. No talking, even among yourselves. Loose lips sink ships. The enemy may be listening. Silence. Silence. SILENCE. Be quiet. Say nothing. BE QUIET. SAY NOTHING." And over again, each phrase half a dozen times.

We were to stay by ourselves until the take-off, no conversation, not even with our best friends in the group and in the squadron, not even to each other. And no letters. No writing home. No mentioning even the possibility of a mission. Not to anyone, our wives, our mothers, our brothers, our sisters. No one. The news, when it was released, would come from Washington, from President Truman himself. But that would be after the bomb was dropped. Meantime, we were not even to speculate, not aloud anyway; we were on an unprecedented alert. We were the "Glory Boys" for sure now.

And then, the usual words of personal warning. Only this time they were more than usual. No mission anywhere at any time had been so thoroughly briefed on the precautions being taken to assure its safety. We couldn't even consider the possibility of capture; we knew too much. That again, was not said—but thoroughly understood.

Off shore from the Empire would be "Superdumbos" —B-29s whose job was not to drop bombs but to warn our base and air-rescue facilities if we ran into trouble; they would also hover in our area to fight off possible enemy opposition. In addition, there would be "Dumbos"—Navy flying boats which would be able—if we were both lucky—to pick us up, in case we had to make a water landing; submarines, called "lifeguards," not far off shore either and also alerted to pick us up if we had trouble. We were told where all air-sea rescue facilities might be expected and how to get in touch with them. Finally, within two hundred miles of the Empire, would be surface vessels, mainly destroyers and cruisers, waiting for us, watching for us—again "just in case something happens." The young Navy officer who told us repeated, again and again, and always in nearly identical words, "Not that anything will happen. This is just to keep the Navy busy. There's nothing for you Army boys to worry about. Nothing at all."

At that moment, I wished he would shut the hell up and would look less like a Navy officer in the movies. And also, and of course and without saying, didn't have all the self-confidence that it's so easy to have when you're not going on a mission yourself.

"I guess you'll all be famous," the Navy officer added as we got up to leave, and he grinned, like the Cheshire cat in "Alice in Wonderland." Only didn't disappear. And I wished he would.

"I envy you," he concluded. "I really envy you boys. This is a real opportunity."

Somebody behind me said several short, meaningful but unprintable words in a loud, rasping voice, and the Navy officer blushed. He was blonde, and he blushed easily.

"We'll be famous," repeated someone else, "if we live. Or maybe we'll just be famous corpses. Very famous corpses indeed."

I turned to see who had spoken, but whoever it was was silent.

When we got outside, it was nearly dark, and the lights were going on all over the tiny island, and you could hear the waves beating against the coral rocks and the shouts from the beach where they were still unloading the ships, and the airplane engines, some of them revving up, some quieting down. And the indescribable, familiar, never-to-be-forgotten sounds of an evening, any evening, in the tropics. Plus, nearby and more familiar, shouts and laughter and a radio from a mess hall.

"God, I'm thirsty," said "Pappy." "I could use a brew."

"Or two, or three or more," said Ray.

"Don't worry," said Buckley. "There won't be any beer left. We've had our beer for the week. And for the next week, too, probably. Plus the week after that. It'll be T. S. for anybody that's thirsty tonight."

Kuharek was silent, and his face looked drawn and, suddenly, old. "What you thinking about, Nails?" I asked him.

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"Be quiet," he answered, "I'm speculating . . . But don't tell." It was a joke, the kind of joke nobody laughed at, and Kuharek didn't expect us to. It was a half-hearted—and completely unsuccessful—attempt at humor.

We started back to our quarters, and far off we could hear somebody singing the Air Corps song, very loud, making like Bing Crosby and Frank Sinatra at the same time and doing it very badly and very loud: "Off we go . . . boo . . . boo . . . boo . . . into the bright blue yonder . . . Riding high . . . ta . . . ta . . . ta ta . . . into the sky."

None of us felt like singing. None of us felt like talking either. And we didn't.

Chapter Three

THE night following the briefing was my second without sleep.

Early in the evening, we'd walked down to the movies and stood in the back for awhile, trying to absorb what was happening on the screen; but we couldn't concentrate on a film—some silly thing about the war in which everyone fought with a clean-shaven face and wore a dress uniform without any wrinkles and in which no one was ever frightened or got killed. We hadn't been there for more than ten minutes when "Pappy" Dehart said, "I think I'll wander back and hit the sack. I'm sleepy." We took off with him, and before we returned to our quarters, we hitched a ride to the air field again—not that I'm meaning to imply that was difficult; Tinian was practically all air field; the field itself was bigger than La Guardia. There were searchlights on, and the ground crews were working on the "Enola Gay" and the "Great Artiste," and there were a lot of MPs around—almost a small regiment, it appeared—looking as if they expected a ground attack from the Japs at any moment.

We tried to walk up to our plane, but they turned us back.

"The hell with it, then," said Buckley.

"That's right," I agreed, "the hell with it."

"You know," said "Nails," "the trouble with real life is it's not enough like the movies. We ought to make life more like the movies, and then everything'd be fine. We'd all be rich, and nobody'd ever get out of work, and we'd all be tall and handsome, and we'd have beautiful wives and drink champagne and sing songs and have five dames each, and all of them would look like Lana Turner, except two. And they'd look like Ingrid Bergman and Hedy Lamarr.

"That's the trouble with life," he repeated. "Practically nobody's built like Lana Turner."

When we got back to our hut, the radio was turned on loud, and some military "expert" was saying how what he called "the situation" would probably be worse before it got any better and that when we landed on the coast of Honshu there'd be more casualties than there were in Normandy and how what he said was "the main bulk" of the Japanese Army hadn't even fought a battle yet and how the war would probably last at least a year yet. Maybe more. "Maybe much more," he added pessimistically.

"I guess he don't know about you Victory Boys," someone in the hut from another group jeered. "I guess he don't know when you guys complete your hot-shot mission, it'll be all over but the shouting. If you go on your super-special mission."

None of us answered him, and he turned around and went back to his card game, still smirking.

After we hit the sack, Ray and I talked a little, and he reminisced that if he were back home in Chicago, he and his girl friend would be at the Trianon about now, maybe dancing to Wayne King's music. After that was over, he continued, they'd have a chocolate soda some place (he'd never had a drink until after he got in the Army) and then they'd probably walk along Lake Michigan before taking a streetcar home.

"Abe," he said, suddenly, "if anything should happen and you come out okay, will you stop off in Chicago and tell my sister and the girl friend?"

"Don't talk like a damned fool," I answered. "Get the hell to sleep."

"No, I mean it, Abe," he answered. "I really mean it."

I closed my eyes and pretended to go to sleep, and after awhile he must have dropped off because I could hear his heavy, regular breathing.

After about an hour, they turned off the lights in the hut, and I thought I could go to sleep then, but I couldn't. I kept trying to count sheep then, but that didn't work. Later a raft of planes came in from a mission; I didn't know how many, and I tried to count them from the sound of their engines, but I couldn't go to sleep on that one either.

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Like the night before, it was nearly dawn when I finally dropped off, and when the whistle blew, I was dreaming that I was flying over New York City in a plane without any wings, and I had a small bomb in each hand, either of which was capable of blowing up the entire city. My hands were getting sweatier and sweatier, and I couldn't hold on the bombs, and I knew what would happen if I dropped them . . . Then I woke up, and I found I really was perspiring.

That morning we had a short test hop, nothing much, the same kind of thing we'd been having ever since we got on the island; the only difference was that we had a Navy commander, Richard Ashworth, who was a Massachusetts man and talked like it, with us; he was going on the real thing—whenever that was.

In the afternoon, I walked down toward the enlisted men's beach and thought I'd go swimming. On the way I passed the officers' beach. It was a stretch of sand and water and sunshine that, when we first arrived on the island, had been open to everyone, officers and enlisted men. Then the jagged and dangerous coral had been blasted away; bathhouses had been built and lockers installed and a loudspeaker put in on which dance records were played. After that, it was like Waikiki Beach in Honolulu, only the water was bluer, or like Manhattan Beach in New York, only less crowded. The enlisted men, naturally, had done the work, but also naturally—in the Army and Navy—when it was completed, the beach was for officers only plus, of course, Army nurses, USO girls, Red Cross workers, and any other assorted civilians who happened to drop in for the week end.

I stood for awhile near the sign that said, "Officers' Country." "Officers' Country"—a kind of never-never

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land for enlisted men, a place for whose inhabitants, there was whiskey, transportation for pleasure trips, clubs, mess boys, bowing and scraping servants, and whatever other luxuries could be imported by plane or ship. "Officers' Country." And no enlisted men or dogs allowed.

What a crock——.

I turned and walked back to our hut. Right then, I would have chucked the whole thing, mission and all, Army and all. It was a feeling I'd had many times before—and since, even after becoming a civilian again. It is not a good feeling for a soldier in what is supposed to be a democratic army.

In the hut, most of our crew was sleeping; they must have had the same trouble I'd had the night before and were exhausted now. I lay down to rest for a few minutes. When I awakened, it was dark, and I'd missed chow, and it was time for the pre-mission briefing.

I knew what this one would be; this was the McCoy. It didn't last more than half an hour, and I don't think any of us minded it much. By now we were pretty well geared for the take-off and could even joke about it.

"You better let me hold your wallet this time, Abe," Ray kept saying.

"No," I'd reply. "You let me hang on to yours. You won't be needing it after this one, and I'm broke."

Well, there wasn't much of anything else to be said. Our primary target was Hiroshima, and we examined some pictures of the town, aerial photos that showed it in considerable detail. We were told that it was a city with a population of about 318,000, that it contained a large quartermaster depot for the Jap Army—the largest in the empire—that it was a port of embarkation and a manufacturing town. Large guns and tanks, machine tools and aircraft ordnance parts were manufactured there. And it would be brimming with Jap soldiers when we arrived; our G-2 had the dope on that.

The take-off was to be at 0345, and, again, the weather ships would take off an hour earlier than ourselves, and there would be a spare plane at Iwo in case anything happened. When the bomb was dropped, we were told to wear the special arc-welders' glasses we'd been issued, to keep our eyes turned toward the interior of the plane and our faces down.

And especially (The intelligence officer said this not once but three times) the three pilots were warned to make a fast break as soon as the bomb was released.

"Get the hell away fast," he said. "You can't tell what will happen. Just get the hell away as quick as you can."

Then Colonel Tibbets rose. He looked a little tired, too, and tense, although he smiled. "Well, fellows," he said, "this is the night we've all been waiting for. We're going on a mission to drop a bomb that's different from any you've ever seen or heard about. . . . Get this, one bomb contains a destructive force that's about the same as 20,000 tons of TNT." . . . He paused and added, "One bomb." Then, "Are there any questions?"

A few men shuffled their feet noisily, and the colonel waited for a minute or so for someone to speak, but no one did. He grinned, and went back to his seat.

After he sat down, the chaplain rose and said the usual things in the usual way, only tonight I said them with him, and so did most of the others. I could hear them mumbling. Any other time somebody would have squirmed or maybe laughed or talked, but now it was so quiet you could hear everyone taking in his breath and letting it out again.

". . . In the Lord's name, Amen," the chaplain concluded, and after he was finished, there was maybe a half-minute of silence before any of us opened our eyes and looked up.

"Good luck," the intelligence officer said. "God bless you and good luck," and he smiled the way a father smiles at a son taking out the family automobile for the first time, although he must have been five or six years younger than I was.

Back at the hut, somebody had found another bottle, and we all had a sip or two and sat there and talked, feeling free and easy for the first time in days, feeling relaxed in a way I know I hadn't felt in forty-eight hours at least. It's a little difficult to explain the emotions experienced just before a mission, when you know you're going and at what time and how far it is and what opposition is expected and when (*if*, of course, always *if*, although you never admit that, even to yourself, especially to yourself) you'll return. It's a little like going to the dentist's office. Once you've made the date, you relax a little. Not completely, but half-way at least. You know it's just a matter of sweating out the patients ahead of you, and you can't (or won't) run away; everything's set. It's irrevocable, and you accept it. Well, that, on a larger scale, is the way you feel before a mission. As I say, not completely relaxed—but half-way relaxed. No use doing any more worrying. You know what you're going to have to do—whether you like it or not. There's nothing then but to wait for the signal to leave.

That night we discussed almost everything soldiers ever do discuss—except, strangely, women. No one

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mentioned women. Why? It would take a philosopher to answer that one. I don't know, except that you talk about women when you're just sitting around, nothing to worry about, nothing coming up, just smooth sailing ahead. I can only explain how I felt; maybe nobody else shared my feeling; perhaps all of them did. I don't know. All I know is that I kept seeing Esta's face, hearing her say, "Take care of yourself, honey"; and, "Don't worry about me, Abe; just keep your chin up. I'll be all right." Or, last and softly and tenderly, "I'll miss you, darling. Hurry back."

The radio was playing very softly, and we mostly talked about what we were going to do after the war and how long it would last and how we'd all met and how we'd have a reunion every year at this time and about the few days the year before when we'd been in Cuba and how much fun we'd had and about the close scrape we'd had the time we were coming back to Wendover from Seattle and got in a storm and thought we'd never make it.

The hours passed very quickly, and I was sure it was still before midnight when, shortly before 0200, the truck arrived to take us to the line. A few minutes before we'd eaten; I don't remember what, a Spam sandwich each, I suppose, and I drank two large cups of coffee, strong, black coffee without sugar.

We were at the ship by 0215, and it was a little like what I'd pictured as a Hollywood première, although without any crowds. Compared to most missions, the field was pretty well deserted. But there were flood lights and cameras and a lot of high brass and some of the scientists. They put recording machines in Colonel Tibbets' plane as well as in our own, and we cracked about what we'd say when the bomb was unloaded.

"Hello, Mom. Hi everybody, hope we won," said Buckley.

At 0320 we climbed aboard. At 0330 the engines started. I kept thinking maybe something would happen, maybe one of the engines would konk out while we were still on the ground; maybe we wouldn't be able to go after all.

But all four engines turned over like in a dream, steady and comfortable, whirring slow, then faster, revving up, getting ready . . . No turning back now . . . No turning back now . . . No turning back now . . .

I remembered again what my wife had said when I'd last seen her, just before I left for overseas. "Take care of yourself, honey," she'd said. "Take care of yourself." And I wondered how. What did you do to take care of yourself? Be sure you wore your rubbers when it's raining? Button up your overcoat? Look both ways when crossing the runway? You could do all that; that was easy, but what did you do now; the chips were down now, way down, really low down. How did you take care of yourself when you were in one of three planes against all the Japs in the world, the three prettiest targets anywhere for the Japs, and six 50-caliber machine guns between you and no fighter protection and the most dangerous bomb ever made at your elbow?

How did you take care of yourself under those circumstances???? I couldn't answer that one because there wasn't any answer.

Exactly at 0345, the *Enola Gay* started rolling down the runway, slow, very slow indeed, then lifting up, and suddenly she was in the air.

A minute later we followed, down the runway, slow, very slow indeed.

Okay, so I prayed then. I admit it. I wished to God

I were just ten hours older, just ten, and we were rolling in, putting down our wheels, lowering toward the runway instead of climbing above it. Just ten hours off my life; I'd have given ten years to avoid those next ten hours—and done it gladly.

But if God heard my prayer, he paid no attention. It may have been that the motors were too loud for anyone to hear what I was mumbling. And, anyway, I wasn't praying by myself. I had plenty of company. An entire plane load of company. I could see that.

Chapter Four

THE stars were out, all of them, it seemed to me, and very close too, so close that you'd have sworn you could have reached out and grabbed one, a small one to take home or to wear on your lapel when—and, of course and naturally, if—you were ever wearing a blue serge suit again. We must have been flying at more than 15,000 feet, and the clouds, looking very white, were far below, and there was no break in them; they were like a very soft white carpet, thick and luxurious, as in, maybe, Rockefeller Center.

It was cold outside, about 33 below Centigrade and 30 below Fahrenheit, but inside it was comfortably warm, room temperature, maybe 65 degrees Fahrenheit —so warm, in fact, that I felt a little drowsy. My eyes actually closed once; then I jerked awake. Albury was at the controls. Sweeney, Beahan, and Van Pelt were on their sacks on the flight deck, actually sleeping. I didn't see how it was possible. There was too much to think about, too many other star-filled nights to remember and too much hoping that there'd be another such night. And not being sure that there would be.

Earlier, I'd heard Captain Beahan—we sometimes called him "Honey Bee," not to his face; to his face, he was "sir" or, more often, "captain"—talking into the recording machine, but I couldn't tell what he was saying.

I tried to imagine what it would be like if we were Japs, with a bomb like the one in Tibbets' ship, speeding, say, toward San Francisco, or even New York. But I couldn't think about things like that very long; it would have driven me off my nut.

I kept remembering the aerial photos of Hiroshima we'd seen at the briefing, the detailed pictures of the bridges, the factories, the houses, and even, in some cases, the dots that were the people. I wondered if those people were sleeping now, and if they had any idea what was coming their way. Of course they didn't.

I think it's safe—and accurate—to say that no one in the world, except, of course, the scientists who'd made it possible, could have imagined the effects of the "thing" we carried, easy as you please, in a single B-29. And even the scientists had said at the briefing (they repeated it later) that they didn't think they'd be successful until the very end of their experiments. And when they knew they were going to succeed, they wished they wouldn't; they kept hoping, as I had before the mission, that something would happen to make their task unnecessary or impossible. But nothing did. Of course not. Don't be silly. Such a thing would occur only in books.

But those weren't exactly the kind of thoughts with which to while away a pleasant evening, either; so for a while I tried—and almost succeeded in—not thinking about anything at all, just concentrating on my radio, tinkering, trying to discover if there were anything wrong with it (although I knew there wasn't), wondering if it wouldn't be my typical luck to miss the all-important message—about the weather and what our target would be. But nothing was wrong; everything was fine.

I talked for a minute to Ray, in the left blister. "How's it going, kid?"

"Quiet. All's quiet on the pre-bomb front. I've been watching the flame up there on the propellers."

The propellers were enveloped in the eerie blue flame that almost always appears on a flight in that part of the Pacific—something to do with the atmosphere, I guess; St. Elmo's fire, they call it. There was more on the plexiglass covering the nose, but that was nothing to worry about. Unless, maybe, on Tibbets' ship the flames might creep in and get to the bomb. . . .

Pfui. Again I tried not to think about anything at all, and I think this time I even dozed a little. I don't know; time passed, and when I looked out again, it was nearly daybreak. Little shots of light were creeping up under the clouds, and I knew that we must be getting close to Iwo Jima, where we were to rendezvous at dawn with the other two strike ships.

Dawn comes slowly in the middle of the Pacific, and you can see all of it, in every direction, in a way you never would in New York, not in a lifetime. First just a little light speckling the sky, then more, like the walls at Radio City Music Hall when the show has ended. Then the purple changes to a very dark blue, and after that a lighter blue, a kind of cobalt with a few pink speckles around the edges. Then, suddenly, as if someone had gotten tired of playing around with slow, indirect lighting, it's morning, and we are circling over Iwo, waiting for our aerial companions. After the other two ships arrived, separately, but within a few minutes of each other, we swung into formation and took off toward the Empire, to the north. Our Estimated Time of Arrival (ETA) over our target was 9:10, Japanese Time. 9:10, August 6, 1945. A time and a date I'll never forget. Neither, for that matter, will the rest of the world.

Now there was just one big thing for me to worry about. The weather report. On that would depend where we would drop the bomb, whether we could get in to our primary target or have to head for the secondary or, even, the third possibility—or whether we might even have to turn back, return to Tinian with the bomb still unexploded. It had happened before, to us, when we had a regular bomb load, turning back when we were practically on top of the target.

The minutes after 8 o'clock, when the report was scheduled to arrive, were the longest of the mission and of my entire life. I had hoped the report might come in early, but, naturally, it didn't. 8:02, 8:04, and my wrist watch continued ticking. Funny thing, it was warm enough in the plane, and I was nervous, more nervous than at either of the briefings, but this time instead of perspiring, I had chills; I shivered, and I hunched my shoulders up. Waited . . . 8:10 . . . 8:12 . . . 8:15 . . . Still no message . . . Was it possible that I'd missed it? Could the radio be dead? Had the

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other two ships already received the crucial message? If I didn't get it, was it possible to break our interplane silence and check? I knew the answer to that one, an emphatic *No.*

8:19 . . . 8:19:20 . . . 8:19:40 . . . Then— My ears perked up; something was coming in; I tensed forward in my seat . . . It was the call signal all right; the primary weather ship was reporting to the ground station . . . I grabbed a pencil, and my hand was shaking so much that I could hardly hold it. I dropped the pencil, and it rolled to the floor and out of reach. I picked up another, and this time my hand was steady enough to translate the code into: "Target clear . . . Visibility unlimited." Then again, "Target clear . . . Visibility unlimited."—that meant okay to bomb. It meant Hiroshima was doomed; it meant the immediate death of tens of thousands of people—exactly how many no one ever knew (or said) . . . And it meant the slow, agonizing deaths of hundreds of others, those with only a scratch, a minor burn, an abrasion that might go unnoticed for days.

I leaned back and sighed my relief . . . The reports from the second and third weather ships followed almost immediately; they were the same . . . It was time, now, to go ahead. I passed the message along to Major Sweeney, who was at the controls, then relaxed for a moment before putting on my flak suit and the rest of my gear. When I was dressed for the "bombs away" flash, I turned on the interphone.

"It's okay, boys," I said, "clear sailing. Hiroshima it is."

"How much longer?" "Pappy" Dehart wanted to know. "I've aged at least another thirty years already."

"It won't be long now," I said. "I can almost taste that whiskey we'll be getting back at the base." My voice sounded confident, almost cocky. I didn't feel that way. I felt that the end of the world was approaching—and fast, the end, at least, of my own personal world.

In front of us and slightly to the left was the colonel's ship, its silver fuselage sparkling in the bright morning sunlight. What a perfect target, I thought; you wouldn't even have to go to a gunnery school to hit that. At that moment it looked as big as a freight car—and easily as vulnerable.

It was nearly nine now, and I began getting that familiar feeling, the one you almost always have on a mission, just before you reach the target, the feeling that your stomach has fallen out of the plane some place, and then a chill begins down in your feet and travels right up to your shoulder blades, and you shiver, and the chill goes back down to your feet. Back and forth. Several times. After that, you begin sweating, and at the same time your teeth chatter a little.

"God," I said, loud enough for anybody to hear if anybody was listening. And again, "Oh, God."

We were over the Japanese coast now, flying so low that in my imagination, at least, I could see the houses, the rivers, the railroad lines, even the grass on the lawns and in the fields. Technically, that's impossible; actually, from our altitude, all I could see was a grey shadow that might or might not have been a coastline and breaks in the shadows that might, maybe, have been houses. But I saw all the rest, clearly and simply. The hand, is as everyone knows, quicker than the eye, and, it goes without saying the imagination is much stronger than the eye. Always.

Nine o'clock. People were going to work now.

They were opening up their offices; the factories were already going full blast . . . School had begun; housewives were dusting, and people were using telephones and telegraphs and writing letters and making business deals and, probably, just getting up with hangovers, "saki" hangovers. They were Japanese people, to be sure, but they were human beings. And I, for one, never forgot that.

Back in New York I'd be getting off the IRT subway now, pushing and shoving the other thousands who were doing the same thing, including my wife, Esta; she'd be rushing to her office, too . . . No, no, that was wrong. Back home it was Sunday afternoon, and she was probably resting, after having been horseback riding or playing a game of golf; maybe she'd been to a matinee at the movies or had gone to Brooklyn to see my parents; perhaps she was simply making herself a cup of afternoon coffee or getting some Sunday supper, a lonely Sunday supper. If I were home, I might be napping, too, and if she were trying to get me up, I'd be saying, "Aw, honey, let me sleep. It's Sunday." . . . But the Japs were going to work now, and they didn't know . . . Maybe some of them heard the roar of our engines, but, still even if they had been through one bombing before, or a dozen or a hundred, they wouldn't be prepared for what was coming.

If there were soldiers below, and there were, thousands of them, they might have seen we were only three planes and have decided we weren't worth bothering about . . . But they couldn't think that for long, surely. It couldn't be very many minutes until they opened up with their ack-ack; that was inevitable. The Japanese anti-aircraft battalions in Hiroshima weren't going to let us in without any opposition. Don't be a damned fool; brace yourself, Spitzer; here it comes.

I thought over the detailed instruction we'd had about what to do if we had to ditch over water. Dozens of times we'd been told and dozens of times we'd rehearsed. "Ditch," the instructions were. "Ditch. Do it quick. No hesitations. No thought. Your plane will stay afloat one minute or less; do it quick; every second counts."

Below us, some place—only not where we'd be needing them; they never are—were the Navy subs and surface craft; somewhere beyond the horizon were the B-29s and the Navy flying boats. And they were very close to the Japanese coast for our special benefit. We were too valuable to be captured and certainly too valuable to die, at least Tibbets was, and Ferebee, his bombardier; they knew too much. All of us, in fact, were in on too many secrets, could tell too much. Not only what we were supposed to say: Name, rank, serial number, hometown, if pressed, and a few kind words about Japanese ack-ack, about the Japanese Army, which had been so wise and so far-seeing as to cause us to bail out but still not smart enough to kill us. That would be all that we could say legally, with the explicit, direct and outspoken agreement of the U. S. Army Forces. But there was more that we knew—or at least suspected. Nothing we'd tell at first, maybe, nothing we'd divulge without urging, but later, with the proper insistence on the part of our interrogators, the brilliant, intellectual Japanese, no one could be sure what we'd say. No one would want to make book on what we'd reveal; no one would with safety be able to place any bets.

All right, so no three-plane mission in history had had so many rescue facilities devoted to its exclusive welfare. I tried to concentrate on how easy it would be for us to be rescued. Nothing to it. A matter of a few minutes on a life raft. Maybe even an hour or two. Perhaps even a day. Or two. Or three. Look at Eddie Rickenbacker. Everybody look at Eddie Rickenbacker, with sea-gulls flying around, lighting on his head, and edible fish jumping out of the water, practically into your mouth. Simplest thing in the world to survive. Look at all the crews who'd been rescued at sea.

On the other hand, of course, look at all those who hadn't. Still, the blonde and handsome Navy officer had said we'd be as safe as we were in the Atlantic just off Jones Beach, or in our bath tubs at home. And yet, and always, the thought didn't cheer me much. Didn't cheer me at all, in fact. I kept remembering the returned prisoner I'd met back at Eglin Field in Florida, the one who had showed us how the Japs had struck lighted matches under his fingers and toe-nails and who had explained the manner in which his testicles had been scratched. And I had in mind the planes, the scores of planes, the uncounted, uncalculated numbers of planes, that had taken off from Tinian and from all the other bases in the Pacific and never been heard from since. "Missing in action," they called it, for several months they called it that, and later, when no "corpus delicti" and no prisoner-of-war report was issued, it became, "KIA." "Killed in Action" to those not initiated. That meant you were dead, no matter what the initials were.

The hell with the Navy's Dumbos, I thought; the hell with the subs and the destroyers and the cruisers and, if they were available, the hell with the battleships, too.

They were far away now, all of them. And they were needed right here and now. At this place and at this moment. . . .

Two minutes out. One hundred and twenty seconds to go. The bomb bay doors on the *Enola Gay* were opened, an easy, mechanical process requiring the pushing of a single button, an imperceptible motion with one finger. I held my breath, and we opened our own bomb bay doors. Pause . . . Pause . . . This was the time for the ack-ack; sometimes they waited for those doors to open. Almost invariably they waited for that particular mechanical process to be performed, at least so I'd been told, so I'd heard. Now the fighters should be rising, little black, insignificant dots down there that, suddenly, became probable, occasionally inevitable death. . . . But now nothing, still nothing. No fighters. No flak. The goddamned fools. Did they think we were on a pleasure cruise? A Cook's Tour of the Japanese Empire? See Japan First? See Hiroshima and die? . . . Join the Army Air Forces and see the world? We were sightseeing, maybe? Or looking for a place to open a five-and-dime store or a delicatessen? Or a hot-dog stand? . . .

Of course, there was still time. Ack-ack takes so few seconds, so little time. You're cruising, confidently and hopefully ahead, and, snap your fingers, wink your eye, draw in a breath, exhale, and there it is, a hit, a direct hit, only one, and you're floundering. So they say. The ones who've had it. Ask the man who owns one. Three well-directed bursts at this moment will do. One for each of us. Or one for one of us. One. One alone for the *Great Artiste.* That's all. One to get ready—for what? Two for the show, a three-ring circus show. And three——

Below the city looked calm and peaceful; it wasn't torn up like most of them, thousands of roofs jammed together, small houses; no front yards. Maybe Monday's washing is hanging out the windows. I'd have sworn, at one point, that I could see the individual blades of grass, although I know that was an imaginative, nervous illusion . . . Well, boys, come and get us. We're ready. You haven't got much time. What are you waiting for? Are you saying your prayers? Are you asking the Emperor for help? Better make your peace with your God right now; a few well-chosen words will do. You haven't much time. Do it quick. Heaven's your destination, maybe. . . . You've got exactly—30 seconds to go.

God, it was hot, hotter than in the middle of a South African jungle; hotter than hell itself. My whole body was dripping sweat. I had my fingers crossed, both ways, literally and figuratively.

Fifteen seconds . . . The tone signal continues; I hadn't even noticed its beginning although, right then, it seemed to be the loudest tone signal in the world; I thought it would deafen me. When it broke, when the signal faltered, that was the second for "bombs away."

When the signal broke, our job was simple; we were to make a 60-degree bank and get the hell away, quick, far away and fast. . . . I was set; everybody was set, everybody except the Japs down there. I had my arc-welder's glasses pulled far down over my eyes, for the maximum protection (A soldier in New Mexico had been partially blinded during the explosion there, and he'd been further away than we were. Remember?) . . . My head was against the hatch; my legs were braced; my eyes were closed tight.

I drew in a breath, and held it . . . And considered the possibility that I might never breathe again . . .

Then the tone signal broke!

Chapter Five

WHAT happened after that takes time to tell, much more time than it took to happen; after all, I found out later that exactly one-tenth of one millionth of a second was required for the bomb to explode and only an unmeasured infinitesimal instant of time for it to drop, less than a minute.

It was precisely 9:15 A.M. when the "bombs away" signal was given, and not even a complete minute of time had elapsed before the flash came.

The events I'm describing now were not all seen by me; they couldn't have been. I have only one set of not-very-good eyes. I've pieced the story together from what I've been told by the rest of our crew aboard —Major Sweeney, Captain Beahan, Van Pelt, Kuharek, Pappy Dehart, Ed Buckley, and Ray Gallagher—as well as the scientists and the men on the other two ships.

When the tone signal broke, I continued to hold my breath or thought I did; I believe all of us thought we did. My fists were clenched together, and my head was still resting against the hatch.

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Almost immediately I could feel the plane go into a steep bank, and we were going faster—or so it seemed—than I ever remember, so fast it felt as if the plane might fall apart in midair, might shatter into a thousand pieces. The speedometer, Van Pelt, our navigator, told me later, registered 280 miles per hour.

Then, even though my eyes were shut, I could see—through the lids, as I remember it, although that may be physically impossible (I don't know) I only know that's the way it seemed—a strange purple light. I opened my eyes. The purple light, now half-blue, completely illuminated the inside of the plane, so brightly that my eyes blinked involuntarily, and I closed them again, then opened them, quickly.

Not more than 50 seconds had elapsed since the tone signal broke.

After that, there was a sharp slap against the plane, and we dropped; how far I don't know; it wasn't far, a few hundred feet, perhaps, but at the same time the plane vibrated violently and I thought—all of us thought—we'd been hit by flak. What seemed like a second hit followed almost immediately, then a third. All this in about ninety seconds.

I threw off my goggles and ran to the navigator's window. It was at that second, when I first looked out the window, my eyes blinking from the brightness of the blinding purple light, enveloping the earth below and the sky above, that I felt, fearfully felt, that I was having an hallucination, that I had bumped my head against the side of the plane and was, perhaps temporarily, seeing something that didn't exist, that couldn't possibly exist. Below us, spread out almost as far as I could see, was a great fire, but it was like no ordinary fire. It contained a dozen colors, all of them blindingly bright, more colors than I imagined existed, and in the center and brightest of all, a gigantic red ball of flame that seemed larger than the sun. Indeed, it seemed that, somehow, the sun had been knocked out of the sky and was on the ground below us and beginning to rise again, only coming straight up toward us—and fast.

At the same time, the ball itself spread outward, too, until it seemed to cover the entire city, and on every side the flame was shrouded, half-hidden by a thick, impenetrable column of grey-white smoke, extending into the foothills beyond the city and bursting outward and rising toward us with unbelievable speed.

Then the ship rocked again, and it sounded as if a giant gun—some large artillery or cannons—were firing at us and hitting us from every direction.

The purple light was changing to a green-blue now, with just a tinge of yellow at the edges, and from below the ball of fire, the upside down sun, seemed to be following the smoke upward, racing to us with immeasurably fast speed—although, we at the same time, though not so quickly—were speeding away from what was left of the city.

Suddenly, we were to the left of the pillar of smoke, and it continued rising, to an estimated height, I later learned, of 50,000 feet. It looked like a kind of massive pole that narrowed toward the top and reached for the stratosphere. The scientists later told us they believed the pole was as much as four or five miles wide at its base and a mile and a half or more wide at the top.

As I watched, hypnotized by what I saw, the column of smoke changed in color, from a grey-white to brown, then amber, then all three colors at once, mingled into a bright, boiling rainbow. For a second it looked as though its fury might be ending, but almost immediately a kind of mushroom spurted out of the top and travelled up, up to what some say was a distance of 60,000 to 70,000 feet. I've never been in Yellowstone Park, but from the movies I've seen I'd say it was something like a tremendous Old Faithful, or rather, a thousand or a million Old Faithfuls boiling over at the same time; the whole column seethed and spurted, but the mushroom top shot out in every direction, like giant waves during an ocean storm.

Then, quite suddenly, the top broke off the column, as if it had been cut away with a sharp blade, and it shot still further up; how far I don't know; nobody did or does; not even the pictures show that, and none of our apparatus could measure it exactly. Some said it was 80,000 feet, some 85,000, some even more. When you start talking about distances like that, it doesn't matter much. To me, it seemed as if it reached the top of the sky, like Jack's Beanstalk. Jack could climb up now; there was nothing between the top of the pillar and the roof of the world.

After that, another mushroom, somewhat smaller, boiled up out of the pillar, and the first cloud, the one that had broken away, spread into a kind of horizontal petal, still boiling and again changing color, to a pure clean white on the outside and a delicate pink toward the center.

Major Sweeny had turned the ship, and once or twice —I was too nervous and excited to notice exactly how many times, and afterward no one else could remember either—we circled the remains of the city below. Not that we could see much; everything was still covered with the thick, dirty smoke, at first a light grey, then, while we watched—changing to a darker grey, turning finally to a black around the edges. All of Hiroshima was hidden by the smoke, and interspersed everywhere were huge, boiling fires. "Pappy" Dehart in the tail, who had the best place for observation, said a few buildings in what might have been the suburbs, or at least the edges of town, were visible, as we broke away to start back.

When we wheeled around, someone spoke, for the first time since the signal for "bombs away." I don't know who it was, but someone who was standing close enough for me to hear said, "I wonder if maybe we're not monkeying around with things that are none of our business."

I didn't answer. I couldn't have said a word without my voice breaking. My hands were clammy and, yes, shaking, too. I merely nodded my head. It was not an answer to the observation; yet I'm not sure my nodding wasn't answer enough.

I sat down at the radio. I didn't look any more; I couldn't have. I'd seen so much in the last few minutes —it was less than five, probably, since the bomb had dropped—that I couldn't have absorbed anything else, and later, when I thought it over, it seemed to me as if the entire, unforgettable, unbelievable event might have been just a short, very brief, bad dream. Not real, not anything that actually happened to anybody. It was too much like a Buck Rogers cartoon. Or the H. G. Wells' stories I used to read in school. Such things simply don't happen in real life; at least they never had before, and what had happened now had taken place so quickly it was easy to think it was just something you'd imagined.

Dehart kept looking back, of course; he was alone back there in the tail, and he says—and this was later verified by the photographs—that when we were far as 280 miles away he could still see the column of smoke.

It wasn't long after that when Colonel Tibbets, over the radio, said that sentence which everyone knows about now, his voice strained a little and the words coming out slow as if he were thinking over each one before he uttered it. "Well, boys," he said, "we've just dropped the first atomic bomb in history." I thought the colonel put it much better later when we were back at Tinian. It was during the post-flight interrogation, when asked to describe the mission, he laughed and said, "Saw city, destroyed same."

What the colonel could not explain then—and what, in fact, no one has ever satisfactorily explained—is why we met with no opposition before we dropped the bomb. Or after. After the bomb had reached its mark, there was no possibility of any ack-ack gunner below being still alive—or, in any case, able to fire. But before? Not a fighter plane. Not a burst of anti-aircraft artillery. Why? No one knows. No one knows, either, why the Japs allowed us to fly all the way down the coast—and, more important, back—without even taking a pot shot at us. We were such easy, unbelievably simple targets, readily available clay pigeons. But they muffed it. If they hadn't, the entire story of the atomic bomb might still be a secret. Our second mission might never have occurred. For that matter, Hiroshima might still be a city—instead of a horrible memory.

By the time the colonel had given us his now-historic message, the report of our action had already been radioed to the base. The mission was a success; the bomb had been dropped, and it had exploded and done its job. It had wiped out Hiroshima.

On our way back we each had a dry C-ration sandwich and more black coffee, Army style. Usually, on the return from a mission there's a lot of talking. Everyone relaxes a little. The danger is passed, and you're glad, damn glad, to be still alive.

But this time hardly any of us had anything to say. A couple of times over the interphones I spoke to Ray and "Pappy."

"You fellows still around?" I'd ask.

"Don't know," Ray said, "the angels are still waving and winking."

"I think I'd just as soon have missed it," "Pappy" answered. "Come to think of it, I won't be mentioning it to my grandchildren. Not ever. I don't think it's the kind of thing to be telling kids. Not what we saw."

I knew what he meant. Or thought I did. It might have been that what we witnessed was too fantastic. Or simply that what we'd gone through was too different from anything any of us had ever experienced before . . . and too horrible to describe adequately. Or perhaps the rest were, as I was, frightened by the very idea that in less time than it takes to draw a single breath a whole city can be (and was) largely demolished by one medium-sized bomb dropped from one not-very-large plane. Not thousands of both. One of each.

Or they might have been wondering, again as I was, what Colonel Tibbets had meant by an "atomic bomb." It's easy to be wise about it now, and practically anybody can (and most people do) discuss the bomb as if they aren't a bit surprised, as if they knew—and had known all along—what an "atom" is and how it can be split and made into a bomb. At the same time,

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of course, some of these same people say that nobody can ever learn how to make it except Americans. Although, as frequently is pointed out, many of the scientists I met who'd helped with the bomb had foreign accents and had only recently become American citizens.

Me, I'm not a scientist, and I didn't know then exactly what an atom is—and I still don't. I'd heard about atoms in high school physics, and that's about all. As I said before, when I heard the words "atomic bomb," they didn't mean much to me, no more than the words "Pearl Harbor" had meant on December 7, 1941. About all I could think of on that flight back was that maybe we really were playing around with something that wasn't any of our business; maybe we had gone too far. We might have made winning a war too easy. Or too difficult. Or too awful. I couldn't be sure which.

And then, too, I kept thinking that the war was surely all over now, that certainly the Japs would surrender immediately and that I was safe and might be going home soon.

It never occurred to me that there'd ever be another mission or that any nation, any people could possibly ask for more of it.

And, finally, I'll admit that, because I'm human, I was a little glad and somewhat smug. For months we'd been taking a ribbing from all the other bomber groups. They'd made fun of us and called us the "Victory Boys." Well, we'd proved our point; it hadn't been just talk. We'd done it, and I was glad. We could dish out our own Bronx cheers from here on in.

When we circled over Tinian for the landing, we'd been gone exactly thirteen hours, and we were exhausted. I had even slept for a few minutes on the way back.

But as we stepped off the ship, all the brass in the world was around, especially the kind with stars, and the movie cameras and spotlights and microphones were there again. Lt. General Carl A. Spaatz greeted Colonel Tibbets and presented him with the Distinguished Service Cross. It wasn't much of a ceremony, and the colonel was too fatigued to do more than smile wanly and shake the general's hand.

The rest of us were hurried into the interrogation room and each given an extra large shot of whiskey before the questioning began.

I didn't say much, personally. I told them what I had seen and, as best I could, what I had felt when the bomb exploded. The latter was a foolish question, unanswerable and completely meaningless. What had I felt? Frightened, of course. But more than that, much more; you're always frightened on a mission. Everyone is, afraid and uncertain, not sure you'll ever return and wanting terribly to return—to go back, to the base, home, to be at that moment anywhere except the place you are. And what else? Well, I didn't say it then, but I'll say it now, and I'll repeat it again and again if anyone asks me. I felt that we were seeing a thing that man should never see, that was too big for the human mind really to understand and, moreover and more important, that even in a war, even in a war in which the enemy in the Pacific had been the most sadistic, most inhuman, most cruel, most hateful enemy in history, we had unleashed a force too great to be understood and properly feared. That we had, in short, learned how to kill too many thousands too quickly.

I thought all that, but, when they asked me the simple question, "What was it like?" I replied in a simple sentence. "It was hell," I said, "absolute hell." I think everyone understood, and I am sure that was about all it was necessary to say.

After the questioning, we had some chow—not eating much—and then went back to our hut, and there was more than one bottle. I don't even know how many. I know I drank too much, more than I ever had before, and, although we didn't talk about where we'd been or what we'd done (we were still under wraps until the news came from Washington), everyone sensed it, and people kept dropping in for a drink or maybe bringing a bottle of their own.

When I hit the sack, I fell asleep for a few minutes but then awakened and slept only fitfully until the next morning. I didn't dream much, although several times during the night I kept seeing that giant multicolored mushroom and that black smoke that had covered the city. And then, I'd see Hiroshima as it had looked in my imagination, at least, just a minute before, the green grass, the tiny trees, the bridges and the houses. And I remembered the scientists; I don't even recall now which one, but when we'd gone into interrogation someone had asked this particular scientist, a young, dark-haired man with a slight accent, how he felt now that the bomb was a success, and wasn't he glad. Wasn't he proud to have had a part in its making?

"No," he said. "I'm not proud of myself right now." And he shrugged off the questioner and walked away, a peculiar, ashamed-little-boy look on his face.

I was, I'll admit, a little tight, just tight enough so that nothing really mattered, but still I couldn't sleep. I tossed and turned all night.

And always before me I kept imagining the vision of what I had seen at Hiroshima.

Chapter Six

I DON'T know what time it was; I forgot to look, but the sun was already hot, and while I slept I had been aware of the sound of planes on the ramps, their motors turning over, being tested for a mission. Someone had been singing—a girl, it sounded like, and there was an orchestra in the background.

After that, I was vaguely conscious of a man's voice, excited and very loud, and he was saying something about atomic bombs. Still half-asleep, I raised up on my elbow; I thought it must be someone in our crew who'd had too much to drink and was telling all he knew, all the information we'd been warned to keep secret.

"Hey, shut the hell up," I shouted. "We have to wait for Washington to release the news."

Somebody guffawed. It was Ray.

"Wake up, Abe," he said. "It's the radio. The cat's out of the bag."

I sat straight up. Sure enough, it was the radio, and an announcer was speaking from Washington and telling the world what we already knew—and then some. The atomic bomb—the announcer spoke as if he'd not only thought up the idea but made it all by himself, personally flown over Hiroshima in a Piper Cub and dropped it—had an explosive power equal to the load of 2,000 B-29s, of 20,000 tons of TNT, check; it had 2,000 times the blast power of any other bomb in the world, check. That much we'd been told before the mission.

The statement from Washington had been released just sixteen hours after the bomb was dropped; and President Truman, who was returning from the Big Three conference at Potsdam, had announced it on board the ship on which he was travelling.

There were other details, too, about the Manhattan Engineer District of the U. S. Army, under whose supervision the bomb had been developed, about the scientists who'd worked nearly three years on the project, the fact that the whole business had cost the U. S. about two billion dollars—a lot of money to me but less than the amount it cost our country every two weeks to pay for the war, and about the cities that had been built up for work on the project at Oak Ridge, Tennessee, and Richland, Washington, and, of course, about the test at Los Alamos, New Mexico, on July 16.

Not much else—except that the Japs hadn't yet mentioned the bomb and that Hiroshima was said to be still burning. An observation plane had been sent over hours later but hadn't been able to see a thing; the whole place was still covered with smoke. And one other item which the announcer slurred over, didn't give much more than a sentence or so. Atomic power, he said, might have peacetime uses, too.

President Truman had said so himself. It might be used—like coal and oil and water—as a source of power, for ships, submarines, automobiles, maybe even lighting cities and heating homes.

"It may be the salvation of man," the announcer said, "or his destruction."

I remember that sentence, even now, the exact words and the precise way the announcer's voice sounded when he said it. I guess the principal reason I remember it is that on the plane as we'd come back the night before I'd kept thinking what a hell of a thing it is how many new ways we can think up to kill people. But how few times we ever get around to thinking up new ways to keep people alive and seeing that they get more food and have better houses and more leisure time.

Maybe this was it. Maybe now we had thought up a way to make life easier. I've thought about that a lot since and been a little surprised—and disappointed—at how few people are saying anything about that other side of atomic energy, its possible peacetime uses.

The announcer didn't mention who'd dropped the bomb or how it'd been released or from what base it had been flown. All that, he said, would be revealed later, which meant we still were under wraps. Some of the details still are locked up and considered "top secret."

"Hell," said Ray, "then they won't have that Hollywood contract today. We're not famous yet. We're still undercover boys."

When the announcer finished, he said, "This is the most important achievement of the twentieth century," and, after that, he signed off. When he had finished, just for a minute, I sat there thinking, and I felt a little

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proud, rather happy and glad that I'd had a part in an achievement so important.

But that feeling didn't last long.

Our crew was alone in the hut now; the others had gone out when the announcer signed off, none of them saying much to us because, although it was officially a secret, they knew we'd been on the mission, and they wouldn't give us the satisfaction of asking us any questions. We were still the "Victory Boys" to them. Besides, they probably guessed nearly everything anyway; there's almost nothing that can be kept a secret when more than two people know about it.

Ed Buckley was the first to break the silence.

"They'll probably have our kids studying about us in school in a few years," he said.

"Hell, by that time they'll be whipping around in atomic automobiles, and they'll be telling us," Ray Gallagher replied.

"I'd like to get home so's I could tell my kids a thing or two right about now," said "Pappy" Dehart.

"Won't be long," I said. "We've been on our last mission. Next time we go flying we'll be flying over that Golden Gate."

"Sure, sure," said Ray. "Dream on, boy; dream on. We'll be flying over the Golden Gate all right, after a couple of years in the good old Empire first. We'll be heading for occupation duty, boy."

"But no more missions," I insisted.

"No," Buckley agreed. "They'll probably surrender today; those little bastards have probably surrendered already; they can't take any more like that."

Everybody nodded, although none of us was quite as sure as he sounded, and we dressed and headed toward the line. It was much too late for chow.

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On the way, a technical sergeant in a jeep slowed up—but didn't really stop, just drove slowly, at a walking pace, and didn't offer to pick us up.

"Oh, the Glory Boys," he said. "Why weren't you guys in on this deal yesterday? The war's going to be all over, and you guys'll still be waiting for your glory."

Nobody answered him, but he kept right on talking anyway.

"The mechanics that was around here this morning was telling me they had a talk with General Spaatz," he continued, "and the general was telling them how this here atomic bomb was dropped from a rocket ship. You just push a button, and this ship flies to the Empire all by itself, lets go with the bomb load and flies all the way back by itself."

"You're crazy," said the corporal who was also in the jeep, "they dropped it by parachute from a P-38. The bomb isn't any bigger than a baseball. My captain knows the fighter pilot that dropped it. He told me all about it."

Then the sergeant noisily shifted the gears of the jeep, and he and the corporal drove on, not even looking back at us. And with no apologies for not picking us up. We trudged on.

No one was asking any questions, although everyone was curious. Actually, no one knew exactly what to ask; right then, it took a lot of thinking just to phrase a question.

There wasn't much to do for the rest of the day; we kept pretty close to the radio in our hut, waiting for the surrender news, but there wasn't any. Nothing at all except the same facts about the bomb, repeated over and over.

I tried to write a letter, but it was impossible; I

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couldn't say where I was or where I'd been, that I'd had anything to do with the Hiroshima business or even that I was in the squadron that dropped the bomb. I started five letters and threw them all away.

Late in the afternoon I walked across the island, all alone, going past the air field that was said to be the largest in the world with its six runways, each of them as broad as the most modern highway back in the states and each two miles long. I stood for awhile near one of the docks which jutted into the harbor, watching the men on the tankers unload their fuel, which was then piped up to the field itself, and I watched the hundreds of planes, some of them just resting in the steaming sun, others with their mechanics at work. One flight—a small one, only a couple of hundred bombers—was taking off for a test mission, one plane leaving the runway every fifteen seconds.

I couldn't help thinking about how unnecessary all that was now; all those hundreds of airplanes wouldn't be needed any more. Just one B-29 with one bomb could do more damage than all these bombers loaded heavy with the ordinary kind of stuff. I thought, too, of the guys who'd made as many as thirty-five missions and accomplished a hell of a lot less than we had in one. And of the guys whose deaths would probably have been unnecessary if we'd had the bomb six months before. If we'd had it two years before, maybe the invasion of Europe wouldn't have been necessary. Almost certainly now we wouldn't need to send hundreds of thousands of infantrymen into Japan itself.

I thought, finally, of the scientist who, when we had returned from Hiroshima the night before, had said it took less than one tenth of a millionth of a second for the bomb to explode. And I kept wondering if all the thousands of Japs who'd been killed had ever had time to know what hit them. And if it was easy to die like that. Later, of course, I knew that the ones who died quickly had been lucky. Their lives had been extinguished in less than a second, in an amount of time so infinitesimal it could not be measured on any ordinary watch. It was the others who were unfortunate, those who had suffered only a minor burn and who weeks later, had died screaming, suffering an indescribable torture. Thinking back on it now, it was those latter that I really pitied. When a bomb is being dropped, you're fortunate if you're in its path, if it's an atomic bomb, that is. In an atomic war, the lucky die quickly. The less fortunate may live on for awhile.

By the time I got back to our hut, it was after chow, and there still hadn't been any news of the surrender —or even any offer of any. But the rumor was that the Japs had admitted the bomb fell, had said it was dropped by parachute and had alleged that there wasn't a living thing in Hiroshima now.

And, even more important, our own government had said that unless the Japanese government announced its surrender, more bombs would be dropped, city after city would be annihilated.

"I think we're bluffing," said Buckley, "we aren't going to let go with any more of those babies. It's just a matter of waiting for them to admit they're licked."

"Sure," we all said. "Sure thing."

About nine-thirty Kuharek came in.

"Been talking to Sweeney and Beahan," he said.

"That's nice," Ray answered. "And so?"

Kuharek motioned us into a corner and whispered.

"We're going to have another test hop in the morning," he said. "There's a new kind of 'gimmick,' and we're going to test it."

"For God's sake, why?" Buckley wanted to know. "They're bound to surrender tomorrow. No doubt about it."

Kuharek shrugged. "I'm just telling you what they told me," he said, "and there may be another mission, too. If there is, our crew will probably drop the new one."

"You're kidding," I said. "You're making funny little noises with your mouth. Now we laugh. Now everybody laughs together."

"Okay," said Kuharek. "Okay, so I'm kidding." And he started to take off his clothes and go to bed.

"I don't believe it," Ray said. "It's impossible."

"There couldn't be another mission," Buckley added.

"The war's over," said "Pappy" Dehart. "It's just a matter of waiting until the little bastards admit it."

Kuharek was sitting on the edge of his bunk, unlacing his shoes.

"Right," he said. "You're exactly right. You guys know all the answers. I made the whole thing up."

The rest of us started to get ready for bed, too, and we joked a little and didn't mention what Kuharek had said, and when we climbed into our bunks, we immediately closed our eyes and feigned sleep.

But none of us actually slept, and none of us really thought Kuharek was joking. We knew better. After all, we'd been listening to the radio for almost twelve hours, and there'd not been even a hint of the Japs hollering "uncle." Unless they did, and did it quickly, there would, quite obviously, be another mission. And, also quite obviously, we'd be the ones who'd fly it, as well as drop the "gimmick." The U. S. Army Air Forces hadn't spent all that time and money to train us for observation missions. Of course, Kuharek was right. Naturally, we'd drop a bomb. And why were we acting surprised? What, after all, were we here for? Otherwise, why all those scores of practice missions?

Actually, there was only one real surprise. A different bomb, Kuharek had said. Something new. Something bigger and more effective. Bigger and better than the first. It was impossible. There was no point in its being bigger. Why? We'd wiped out a city of three hundred thousand people with the last one. What more did we want?

And another mission. Didn't they know the war was over? We just had to sit tight and wait for a day or so. The surrender would come, automatically and with no trouble. We simply had to sweat out the signing of certain papers. There was no need for more missions, more bombs, more fear and more dying. Good God, any fool could see that. But I was only going over a losing argument with myself, and I knew it.

I smoked almost a full pack of cigarettes before morning.

Chapter Seven

FROM the very beginning, August 8 was the kind of day to be hurried through, forgotten as quickly as possible—and never remembered again.

In the first place, I woke up with a roaring headache, and nobody had any aspirin; second I'd missed breakfast, and if ever there was a morning when I needed coffee, that was it; but it was too late. Third, and worst of all, the weather was unpleasant. The sky was overcast, and an overwhelming, muggy heat hung over everything.

I didn't even have enough energy to get out of bed. I simply lay on my sack for the entire morning, listening to the radio. All the news still concerned the Hiroshima raid, and there wasn't a word about a possible surrender, not even a surrender offer. About the only new development was that President Truman had warned the Japs again that unless they gave up, the bombs would keep on coming, and coming, and coming.

Then, just to make everyone cheerful, a few more details about what the first bomb had done. It had, the announcer said, destroyed most of the city; had, the aerial photos showed, almost completely wiped out an area of about four and a tenth square miles (the

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equivalent of an eighth of Manhattan Island, as I figured it).

And, oh yes, when the bomb exploded it created a temperature of approximately 150 million degrees Fahrenheit.

"Slightly cooler than right here at the moment," said Ray. "Hey! Hey!"

"Heh! Heh!" we answered.

Finally, the announcer revealed that the tremendous heat had created a pressure which, in turn, had pushed out all the air in the area, stirring up a wind travelling as much as 500 to 1,000 miles an hour.

A charming thought for the morning before a raid.

"Oh, what a beautiful morning," Ray hummed, "oh, what a beautiful day."

Buckley threw a shoe at him, and I heaved a book I'd been reading, *The Case of the Missing Corpse.* Unfortunately, we both missed.

After the rest of us had showered and shaved, Kuharek, who'd been up for hours, returned to tell us we were going on a test mission to see what gave with the new bomb. Just a short flight, an hour or so in the area of the island. If the test was successful, the new bomb would replace the first one, making it obsolete.

The flight was very short, and the test was very successful.

Unfortunately, I kept thinking. Unfortunately, it must be reported that the test was a complete success. Yes, sir.

But when we got back to the base, the weather was still threatening, and it was getting darker every minute.

"It sure looks like a storm is brewing up," said Buckley. "It looks like all hell might break loose in a minute."

"Yeah," "Pappy" Dehart agreed. "May storm for days, too. This is the rainy season."

"Couldn't possibly take off in weather like this," Ray agreed. "It'll probably ground every ship on the base."

"Maybe for days," said Buckley. "Maybe for weeks."

But after chow, things looked a little better. Quite a little better.

And, "There's a pre-flight briefing at 1600," Kuharek informed us.

"Oh," we replied, then again, "Oh." Good! Wonderful! Great!

During the afternoon, everybody wandered off by himself some place. It was a time when you wanted to be alone. I stayed in the hut, nursing my headache and trying to keep my mind occupied with something. Anything except what was coming up.

For one thing, I wrote letters to all my brothers, just the usual, "How are you? I am fine. Don't worry about me. I'm doing fine. Not much happening, and take care of yourself." Just short letters, telling them that on the first of August, after twenty-three months in grade, I'd made sergeant. And wasn't that wonderful.

After that, I still had a couple of hours to go, and I wrote out some notes on the crew, for my own amusement more than anything else, then, too, although I didn't admit it even to myself, it would be interesting for the wife and family if something should happen. They'd want to know whom I'd been flying with and what they were like.

I still have the notes, and I'll insert them, with some few revisions, here, more or less to introduce the crew of the *Great Artiste*. Some of the facts may make interesting footnotes for an historian some day—if there's anyone around to write the history of the crew of the *Great Artiste,* the boys who dropped the bomb on Nagasaki.

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Ed Buckley, the radar operator, is probably the bravest man I know, at least one of the bravest. I don't know why unless it's because he feels, as he once told me, that he's living on borrowed time. In 1939, he was sick for weeks with a kidney infection; no one thought he'd live, and neither did he.

"Whatever came after that," he once said, "was velvet, pure velvet."

And of all the men on the crew Buckley, as I've mentioned, probably liked flying least. He was really a country man; he had a grocery store back in Lisbon, Ohio, but he also had a farm, and he preferred the farm. Because of the animals, I think; he loved animals, as I said earlier, and used to race greyhounds and raise horses, and for two years he'd studied to be a veterinarian, one year at Ohio State, another at Pittsburgh University.

And he probably missed his home more than any of us, although homesickness is a difficult emotion to measure. He had a wife and a year-old son, and he seldom talked about anything else, except what it would be like back in Ohio at any particular time, in the spring how he'd be planting crops, in the fall how he'd be harvesting, in the evening how if he were home he'd just be finished with the milking, in the morning what it was like to be up with the sun and walking through the fields before the dew disappeared.

But the peculiar thing about Buckley is that he could have stayed out of the Army. Don't ask me why he didn't. In all the time I knew him, I never found out

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the answer to that one. He never talked about "patriotism," or about "democracy," or about hating the Japs or any of the other simple, easy things that they mention in the movies and newspapers and on the radio.

For a long time, Ed was classified 4-F, and he could have stayed that way. He mentioned it one night when he'd had too much to drink. "Sometimes I wish I'd stayed a lousy 4-F," he said. "In a year or so it won't make any difference. I'm just a sucker, I guess." He'd pestered his draft board until they'd changed his classification and made him 1-A. Then, in June, 1942, he enlisted. He joined our crew in November 1944, and one of the first nights we were drinking together, he said, "I guess we'll be going overseas, won't we?"

Yeah, we all answered, yeah, we'll be going overseas.

"That's good," he said. "I'm glad." And that was all, except that a little while later he told us how, when he was 19, he'd hitch-hiked to California to see the Olympics and that after that, almost every year, he went on a trip some place; he'd been in most of the forty-eight states.

"I don't know why," he said, "but every once in a while I get restless and curious, too. About what it looks like some place else, and then I take off for a month or so."

After we got to Tinian, he was always interested in what the natives did, if they planted any crops, what kind of food they ate, and how long they'd been there.

"I guess they're really just about like anybody else if you get to know them," he used to say.

I may never see Buckley again now. We all talked about how we'd get together, when the war was over and we were all civilians again, the reunions we'd have, the lies we'd tell. But we probably never will.

The one thing about Ed that will always puzzle me is why he enlisted, why he didn't stay out of the Army. He could have. Or why, when he got in, he asked for combat in the Air Forces. He didn't like flying, and God knows he was a mild, shy man who didn't enjoy killing.

I guess, though, if I could figure that one out I'd understand why we won the war. Because there were a lot of men like Staff Sergeant Ed Buckley in the United States Army.

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Ray Gallagher, our assistant flight engineer, was probably one of the few men in the Army who had a doll—and got away with it. When he first went in the Army, in 1942, his two-year-old niece, Marguerite Mary, insisted on giving him all her dolls as a farewell present. He talked her out of that one, but three years later, on Christmas 1944, she gave him her favorite, a blonde, blue-eyed doll, Mary Ann, and he accepted it.

After that, Mary Ann was with us on every mission; we wouldn't go without her; she was a kind of good-luck charm. Before we took off for Hiroshima, Buckley missed her.

"We can't go," he said, "Mary Ann isn't here," and he was serious; all of us were. Then Ray took the doll out of his pocket, and hung her up in the left blister where he sits during a flight. We relaxed then; everything would be all right. There was nothing to worry about. And even at the base, in our hut, you'd see Ray fondling that doll, and no one on our crew ever laughed or made cracks. The doll was to Ray what my wife's picture was to me, a part of home to be held on to and cherished.

Ray, who was my particular friend, was born in

Chicago, in 1921, the youngest of a family of six boys and four girls. He is Irish and quiet and soft-spoken, and in all the time I knew him, he was practically the only man in the Army I never heard curse beyond a very rare "damn" or "hell."

Before the war, he'd been an apprentice machinist in Chicago, but he didn't want to go back to that. I don't think I ever met anyone in the Army who wanted to go back to what he'd been doing before the war. He wanted to get married; he was engaged, and, in the back of his mind, was a vague ambition, a dream that maybe he could go into some kind of business. He didn't know what, just a business where, at least some days a week, he could wear a white collar and a business suit. A peculiar ambition? Maybe, but very typical.

He had one brother who was a Marine and two who were in the Navy. After V-J Day a bunch of guys in our hut were talking about whether there'd be another war, and a couple were sure—as some people always are—that there would be.

"Eventually, we'll have to fight Russia," one of them said. "It's inevitable."

"No," Ray answered. "I don't believe it. I don't believe we have to fight anybody any more—ever."

The other man laughed.

"You're Irish, aren't you?" he wanted to know. Ray nodded.

"You'll be one of the first to enlist. You'll be right out in front."

"No," Ray said. "No more wars for this kid. I know what that bomb can do. I saw what it did, twice. There'll be no more wars for this kid."

And he meant it.

It was a bad year in Pittsburgh; 1931 was a bad year everywhere in the United States. There weren't any jobs or any promises of any. There were a good many breadlines, and Franklin D. Roosevelt was just the governor of New York, and nobody'd even heard the words "New Deal."

John Kuharek was 17 that year, one of a family of seven in Pittsburgh. There was an Army recruiting station not far from where he lived, and outside was a large sign which said: "Join the Army . . . Travel . . . Education . . . Security." John walked in one day and signed on the dotted line. He wanted all three of what the Army offered, but especially he wanted travel.

He's been a soldier ever since and has spent half his nearly fifteen years of service overseas, mostly in Hawaii, which was, he says, a good place to be stationed, a few hours work in the morning, two or three at most, and the afternoons and evenings to yourself, maybe swimming at Waikiki or drinking beer in the post exchange or just doing sack-time. It was an easy life, the peacetime Army.

But "Nails" Kuharek wanted adventure, whatever that meant; he wasn't sure, but he hadn't found it in the experimental tank outfit to which he was attached. There wasn't going to be a war, anyway; so he decided he might as well get in something where, at least, there'd sometimes be some excitement. He transferred to the Air Forces, in 1937, and by 1944 was one of the best engineers in the Air Forces, so competent that when Colonel Tibbets at Eglin Field, Florida, requested a top-priority engineer, he got John, who spent his first anniversary as an aerial engineer over Hiroshima.

Kuharek, of course, planned to re-enlist; he didn't have long to wait for retirement, only six years. And he'd still be a young man, he pointed out, young enough to enjoy life and his pension.

And the peacetime Army was better, for John anyway; he couldn't understand the conscription Army that fought the war. He disapproved of the free and easy way officers treated the men and what he called the "lack of discipline"—whatever that meant. And, especially and above all, that all the "duration and six" men, as he called them, hated Army life and counted the hours until they'd be discharged. To Kuharek, Army life was the only good life there was. It was the only life he knew.

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Captain Kermit K. Beahan is like a story-book Texan. He has a hearty voice, is usually grinning, is a little over six feet tall, and weights slightly more than two hundred pounds. There probably are, somewhere, people who don't like him, but I've never met them. We never took a vote, but, over-all, I'm sure he would have been chosen the most popular officer not only in our squadron but in the entire group. And "Honey Bee" automatically and immediately found something to praise in everyone. It sounds a little corny to put it down on paper, and maybe he didn't mean it, but several times I've heard him say, "I don't think I ever met anyone I didn't like." Probably it's true.

In August 1942, Beahan flew in the first Air Force bombardment raid against Germany; after that, he flew eleven other bombing missions from England and then, after flying on the plane that transported General Eisenhower from Gibraltar to Oran at the beginning of the North African invasion, he flew nineteen missions in the Mediterranean theater and was shot down twice, once

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just outside of Bizerte, only a few miles from the enemy lines and after both his pilot and co-pilot had been wounded.

But always he escaped. "You can't hurt me," he used to say. "I played football in Texas, and, after a few games with those Texas boys, there's nothing can hurt you." He was on the first-string football team at Rice Institute, where he majored in physical education; his home is in Houston.

After his thirty-one missions on the Atlantic side, he was returned to the States. A veteran with two Purple Hearts, he was not, the Air Force decided, to fly any more combat missions. He would be an instructor for the remainder of the war.

"I knew that was crazy," he once told me, "I knew they couldn't win this here Pacific war without me." Colonel Tibbets, who had been Beahan's squadron commander in Europe, needed a top bombardier; so in September 1944 he brought the captain to Wendover Field.

"It's a good thing, too," Beahan said, after the Hiroshima raid, "Texas would never have got over it if there hadn't been at least one Lone Star man on that raid. Never would have believed this here atomic bomb was any good without a Texas man to look after it."

When he'd first gone into the Army, Beahan had expected to return to Texas after the war, probably to become a high school football coach, but long before he got back from Europe, he'd made up his mind that he'd never go back, that he'd spend the rest of his life in the Army.

"I guess football would seem like little-bitty boy stuff now," he explained. "I don't guess I could get very interested in a little-boy game when I've been playing

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these big-boy games for so long. I don't guess I'd care much who won, and that would be bad, very bad. They'd tear me apart down there in Texas if I didn't care about that."

A bombardier has one of the most difficult and technical jobs of any of the crew; he has to get the bomb down at the right split second and on the button, but his job lasts only a few seconds on every mission. Otherwise, he has nothing to do. Most bombardiers are bored, but not Beahan. Most of them sweat out the entire mission. But Beahan slept. "I figure if I'm gonna die, I might as well die as pleasantly as possible," he explained, "and I can't think of a thing in the world that's any more pleasant than sleeping. Can you?"

Nobody ever could, but practically no one else could sleep, either. Only Beahan, who had iron nerves and whose motto seemed to be, "nothing ever bothers me." Which, as a matter of fact, was true.

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Of course, all officers in the U. S. Army are "gentlemen," automatically by definition and by act of Congress. On some, it doesn't fit very well. As far as I've seen, on most it doesn't fit very well. But Captain James F. Van Pelt Jr., our navigator, would have been a gentleman anywhere. Why, I don't know; it may have been that he was soft-spoken, that he was almost always more interested in the comfort of the crew than in his own. It may have been simply that he never shouted and that he never became angry at anyone or anything. As I say, I don't know. I'm not even sure I could define a "gentleman," or that I'd care to; I just know that Van Pelt was one and that that is a good thing to be.

He was also amazingly competent. For my dough, the navigator has the toughest job on the crew of a bomber, next to and, I think, almost the equal of that of the pilot. Van Pelt, who before he joined the Army in 1940 had been a pre-medical student at the Virginia Polytechnic Institute, did his job well. For months, he sat at arm's length from me on all our flights, shooting the sun during the day and the stars at night, correcting drift, making the million and one complicated and lengthy mathematical calculations necessary to get our ship to its destination and back, never saying much, always working. Unlike Beahan's job, Van Pelt's never really ended, from the time of take-off until the wheels were lowered at the end of a flight. Almost always, he'd be sitting at his desk, chewing on the top of his pencil, his dark, handsome face screwed into a frown, his almost black hair mussed and falling over his eyes.

The captain read a lot, and good books, too, politics, history, the best novels and, very often, even medical text books. He plans to return to his studies, to specialize in obstetrics.

There are incidents that will, for the rest of my life, recall each of the crew members to me. I think what I'll remember longest about Van Pelt are two things he said to me, at different times. "You know," he once remarked, while we were still back in the States, I believe, "it's a funny thing about politics. Nobody ever pays much attention to what's happening in the world—or tries to do anything about it. We're always too busy, eating, sleeping, working, immersed in our own little business of living. Then, suddenly, politics makes it impossible for us to go on in our own way any more. We're jerked off to a war, a war we never really understood. Maybe we ought to spend a little more time worrying about what's happening in the world; maybe we even ought to try to do something about it once in

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awhile. Maybe then we wouldn't have to take time out of our lives to fight a war at all."

And then, later, when we were coming back from Hiroshima, he turned to me, quite suddenly, smiled and said, very seriously, "You know, Abe, I've spent most of my life trying to learn how to keep people alive, and if I ever get to be a doctor, and I work day and night, year in and year out, bringing babies into the world and saving all the lives I can, I'll never even make a dent compared with the number of lives we took back there.

"Not even a dent. The people I save and help get born would be lost in that crowd of dead." He paused again. "It's not a very pleasant thought, is it?" he wanted to know.

No, it wasn't a very pleasant thought, then, or since, and it's been on my mind a lot, both what the captain said about saving lives and about politics. Both make sense, rare and good sense.

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There was never any doubt about the fact that Major Charles W. Sweeney, our pilot and squadron commander, was Irish. Like most Irishmen, he made a point of it. "Okay," he used to say, his voice warm with a New England mellowness (he came from North Quincy, Massachusetts), "okay, I'm a mick, and I don't know what the hell I'm doing fighting on the same side as England. Doesn't make any sense. Doesn't make any sense at all. Only thing, it'd make a lot less sense if I were fighting on the same side as the Japs."

The major, "Chuck" to his fellow officers, "the major" or "sir" to the rest of us, never worried much, and he never got excited. Even when we ran into a storm and it looked as if we wouldn't make it, as had happened several times, he'd turn from the controls, wink at us and say, "Sit tight, boys, we'll get out of this one. Don't worry." We always did, too. In more than three thousand hours of flying, the major had never had even a minor accident.

He had entered cadet training in April 1941. "I'm the kind of a guy who always thought he ought to have his own plane," he once said, "and then the government comes along and offers to teach me to fly one, so I figured I might as well get in on the ground floor. When they start using these things like taxis, I can always get a job as a hack. I'd be a damned good cabbie. Damned good."

Sweeney had flown almost every type of single-, twin- and four-engine plane used by the U. S. Army Air Forces, and he was operations officer at Eglin Field, Florida, when he met Colonel Tibbets. The colonel was then experimenting with the first B-29s developed.

"So I just invited myself in," the major explained. "I figured there was no use monkeying around with Fords and Chevrolets when I could be flying a Rolls Royce."

He requested a tranfer to Tibbets' outfit, which was granted in December 1943, but it wasn't until September 1944 that he joined the colonel and the rest of us at Wendover and took over the testing program with the "gimmick" and soon became squadron CO.

"I might just as well stick around in the damned Army," Sweeney used to say. "I've flown so damned many of these things I'll never be any good at anything else. Besides, I don't believe in automobiles any more. Too damned slow. Why ride when you can fly?"

To that, of course, there was no answer except that

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"Chuck" Sweeney was one of those rarities, a natural pilot. What's more important, he loved flying, and almost everything else bored him.

"They'll probably break me down to a second looie after the war," he once commented, "but, hell, as long as they let me steer one of these big babies around, I got no complaints. No complaints at all." Then he'd grin; his grey-green eyes would crinkle, and he'd muss his close-cropped brown hair and say, "Eddie Rickenbacker's got nothing on me. We're both lucky." And I guess they both are.

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When Charles Donald Albury—affectionately nicknamed "Donald Duck" in the Army—was a boy, he felt about airplanes the way most kids feel about automobiles. He knew every make, could identify each of them in the air, knew what kinds of engines they had and how much horsepower and their speed. He bought all the aviation magazines; he made model planes and entered them in contests and almost always won. There was never any doubt about what he wanted to do; he wanted to fly, and he did. He began taking lessons when he was 18, in 1938, at a field near his home in Miami. He worked after school and summers to make enough money for his training, and even after he entered the University of Miami to study engineering, flying still took all his spare time.

Naturally, when the war came along, he enlisted as a cadet; that was in October 1942; he won his wings in July 1943, and in January 1944 joined Colonel Tibbets at Eglin.

I think the thing that impressed me most about Albury, as about many of the young officers in the Air Forces, was his maturity. When I was twenty-five, I'm

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sure I didn't know as much about handling men as he did; in fact, maybe I don't yet and never will. If there's anything good about war and the Army—and I doubt that there is about either—it can only be that, the way in which, sometimes, it develops capable young leaders who might not, in civilian life, be given so much of a chance for years. Perhaps that's not unusual; it may be only the fact that responsibility—and the pilot of a plane costing several hundred thousand dollars certainly has that—quite naturally brings out the best in men. I don't know. More probably, it's mere intuition, the kind of intuition that caused Albury never, so far as I know, to give an order. Instead, he asked you, please, to do something. An important difference, although if you've never been in the Army maybe it's impossible to understand.

Albury never had any doubts about his post-war plans. He'd continue flying, naturally; first, he'd try getting a job with an air lines; that's what he wanted, but if he couldn't do that, he'd stay in the Army.

"Aviation's the only thing for a young man," he used to say. "It's the most important thing going on in the United States. In a few years, people who don't know how to fly will be as out of place as somebody who doesn't know how to drive a car now."

Although born and raised in Miami, Albury didn't have a trace of a southern accent. He spoke sharply and crisply, and he never spoke at all unless he had something to say. Even if he hadn't been an officer, he would probably have been the one in the crew to whom the rest of us would have turned if we were in trouble and needed help.

You don't meet many men in the Army that you particularly care about seeing later. Albury was an exception. We'll probably never have the crew reunions we were always planning, but I'm sure I'll see "the captain" again, and I'm sure he'll still be "the captain" to me. He's one of the few officers I never objected to saluting, and that's rare, very rare indeed.

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"Pappy" Dehart was a quiet Texan; there are some, I guess. He deliberately asked for the job of tailgunner in a '29 because he could be alone for hours on end, and Albert Travis Dehart liked being alone; he seldom said much and then only a sentence or two, letting his words slip out of the corners of his mouth as if he were as surpised as anyone to find that he had a comment to make. There was a sadness about "Pappy" that I never understood; he smiled occasionally, but you always felt he never really meant it, that he probably felt more like crying.

Maybe it was that, more than any of us, he seemed to hate the war, and he loathed the Army. The later word is not too strong to describe his feelings; he used considerably more explicit language to describe his emotions himself.

Every time he climbed into the tail for a mission, he'd curse and swear, not about anything in particular, just about the idea that a man his age should suffer the indignity of having to fly in a plane when, obviously, he would much rather have been riding a horse back home in Plainview, Texas.

"I'm a man who needs a lot of space," he would say. "I like to be some place where I can look in every direction and not see another human being. I don't think I'd mind being the only man in the world.

"As a matter of fact," he commented after the first raid, "it looks to me like it's going to be possible to do away with most of the people in the world. Except those in my part of Texas. Not even a bomb would bother them much, and it'd have a hell of a time getting at them anyway. Texans can run, and they can dig in, too. Besides, nobody'd got anything against Texas; nobody wants to fight us about anything."

After the war, "Pappy" wanted to try cattle ranching. "Cows are smarter than most people," he once said. "And better looking, too."

Why he didn't fight for deferment, I never knew. The point was, he could probably have stayed out; he had a wife who was sick most of the time, and two children. Three perfect excuses to remain a civilian.

About the only hint I ever got, and "Pappy" was half-joking when he said it, was his comment a little while after the Hiroshima briefing. "I'm not a man who can take much of what the Army dishes out," he said. "I'm too set in my ways, and most of the time I wonder why in hell I ever walked up to that recruiting office and signed that piece of paper. Of course, if I hadn't got in the war, I guess I wouldn't have been able to live in Texas afterwards."

He didn't say anything for several minutes after that, and I thought he was finished. Finally, he added, "I guess I wouldn't have been able to live with myself afterwards either."

So maybe that's it. Maybe that's explanation enough of why a bald, thin, unhappy Texan who hated every part of the Army and the war, including chow and Quonset huts and GI shoes and the entire Pacific ocean, had a tailgunner's view of what the bomb did.

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Second Lieutenant Fred Olivi spent a lot of time worrying about how old he was. He was only 23, but he felt, as I suppose you usually do when you're that young, that he'd lived at least half his life already, that if and when he went back to the university career that the war had interrupted he'd be ridiculously older than the rest, that he'd been away too long to remember how to study and, finally, that he'd never be able to settle down any more, that he'd have what he called "hot pants and itching feet and a gleam in my eye."

Olivi was a short, chubby, dark-haired man, a boy really; he was young even for his age, and he was of Italian ancestry and from a Chicago family of five. He'd been a completely average high school boy, had played basketball, football and baseball and didn't particularly excel in any of them, was a track man, was, when the war came along, working his way through the University of Illinois. He'd gone to Italy as a child and, after the war, planned to return, at least for a visit, sometimes he thought to live. He had property there.

"There'll be a lot of work to do in Italy," he said. "I mean the whole country will have to be built up again, and the Italians are tired. Musso made them tired, and they'll maybe need me to help. Besides, probably there won't be any jobs back in the States. I mean there'll be a depression; there always is, and, anyway, I think I'm too old to study any more and I'm not sure what I want to do, and I wouldn't be very good at selling apples on street corners. I mean I'd eat up all the profits. I mean I'd be hungry. I always am."

Olivi talked a great deal, and he sang often and loud, to try to cover up the fact that thinking about the postwar world frightened him. As it did all of us.

Once he mentioned that he'd been reading a book by F. Scott Fitzgerald, which one I don't know, and for days afterward he talked about "the lost generation" of after the last war, the soldiers who, returning, couldn't fit into civilian life.

"It'll be just like that again," he said. "We won the war, and somebody'll screw it up for us, and then there'll be a lot of people out of work, and to get people back to work, we'll have to get ready for another war, and God knows what all.

"Not a very cheerful idea, is it?"

"No," we all agreed. Not a very cheerful idea. But what Olivi said, all of us, to a greater or lesser degree, felt. And hoped we might be wrong. But were never sure that we actually were. Never sure at all.

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Well, that's the list as I wrote it that afternoon, not for publication, certainly not that, simply as a record "just in case." When I got back to New York, I went to the Public Library and one afternoon read all the newspaper and magazine stories that had been written about the members of the crew.

I discovered that, according to most accounts, all of us were something called "heroes," whatever that means, that we had all said we were "delighted" to be able to have anything to do with the bomb, that we considered it a "rare privilege to have been chosen," that we were the "fearless, handsome crew of *The Great Artiste,*" and that we were a "youthful group of curious young men, fascinated, like the rest of us, with the bomb."

There were pictures with some of the stories; so I knew the writers really were talking about us, but, in some cases, there was practically no other resemblance to fact. As you can see, we weren't heroes, and most of us weren't youthful and handsome, and God knows none of us was completely fearless. Far from it.

I suppose if I were writing a story like some of those I could tell you what everyone was thinking that afternoon, as we sweated out the briefing for the second raid, but, actually, I don't know. I know only what thoughts went through my own mind, and, by now, I've even forgotten some of those.

All I can tell you about our crew is that, essentially, we weren't very different from any of the tens of thousands of others in the U. S. Army Air Forces. On the average, a little more competent in our jobs, I suppose; after all we'd been chosen for that.

But I'm afraid if anyone expects to discover that any of us was in any way unusual, or that, before the war, we had lived exciting lives, he'll be disappointed. We hadn't. We had lived very ordinary lives, and the fact is that we were all ordinary guys who happened, by some never-to-be-understood combination of chance, to have been thrown together as the crew of a plane that happened to make history. When the fiction writers get around to doing stories about us, if they ever do, I'm sure they'll make us a hell of a lot more interesting and glamorous. I hope so.

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When I had finished writing, I took a shower, and by the time I was through, the rest of the crew was drifting back to the hut. It was nearly time for the briefing, scheduled for 1600.

"I think I'll miss this briefing," Buckley cracked. "I know every word they'll say. I know who'll say it and what everybody'll sound like. Besides, I'd rather stay here and take a nap. Let's all stay here and take a nap."

"Sure," we said, flopping on our bunks. The time was ticking away, and by 1545, everyone was tense, waiting for someone else to make the first break for the door. We weren't going to miss the briefing, and each of us knew it. We weren't even fooling each other.

It was Kuharek who got up first, slowly and deliberately. "Let's go, guys," he said. He would, I thought. The disciplined Regular Army man. He would. Then we all jumped up and hurried into our clothes. It was late.

On the way to the combat room, Ray kept glancing anxiously at the sky.

"I still think it looks pretty bad," he said. "I still think maybe we won't be able to make it."

"Sure," I answered, "and would you mind giving me a puff off that marijuana cigarette you're smoking?"

The combat room was as before, a little crowded with brass, smoky and noisy, but when we came in, everyone quieted down, and the business began immediately. It was the same as before the Hiroshima raid, and Buckley was right; the same people said practically the same things in practically the same way. Only details differed. We were to drop the bomb this time. All right, so we knew that already. And our primary target was to be Kokura, our secondary, Nagasaki. Those were only names to me; they meant nothing. I couldn't get excited; one city was the same as another.

All I could get excited about was the fact that the bomb we were to carry was bigger and better than the first. "Bigger and better," the intelligence officer kept repeating, and I kept thinking he had made a poor choice of words. "Bigger," maybe. "Better?" I doubted if that were the way to describe a bomb that would kill more people. But then, of course, I could have been wrong. I probably was, although I haven't changed my mind.

And that was that. We were to report back at 2230. Until then, the intelligence officer said, "Your time is your own. Only don't circulate too much, and don't talk to anybody."

It wasn't a very intelligent way to spend what I, at the time, thought might be my last hours on Tinian. But I went back to the hut, practically collapsed on my bunk and almost immediately fell asleep. Except for chow, I slept until nearly time to get ready for the specialized briefing. When I got up, it was almost 2200. First off, my headache had disappeared. And, second, I felt calm and rested and ready for almost anything. Even ready for what I had to be ready.

The air outside was crisp and even a little cold, but the sky was still filled with clouds; there wasn't a star to be seen. Occasionally, there would be a flash of lightning, and it still looked as if a storm would stir up at any moment.

Frankly, I couldn't have cared less if it had stormed—or cared more. Frankly, I would have welcomed a good storm right then, a small cyclone maybe, a minor cloudburst, perhaps, a minor typhoon.

But none of those happened. Instead, the weather merely continued to threaten, and, obviously, the mission would go off as scheduled. Storms come only when you're going on a picnic, never when you're going on a mission. That's the nature of storms.

Chapter Eight

SEVERAL of the scientists were at the briefing that night, and again I was amazed at how young they were. None of them was more than thirty, I'm sure, and some must not have been much more than twenty.

Before the formal briefing began, they told us about Oak Ridge, Tennessee, where almost all of them had been at one time or another, and about how, when they'd first started working on the bomb, they hadn't thought it could be done.

"In maybe fifty or a hundred years, we thought it might be possible," one of them said, "but not in our lifetime, certainly."

"Later," another added, "we knew we were going to succeed and rather hoped we wouldn't." As long as Germany was still in the war, he said, the scientists had worked with enthusiasm; they knew that if the United States failed with the bomb, Germany might succeed.

"Then it was a race against time, because we knew the Nazis wouldn't hesitate to use the bomb—if they had it." But after V-E Day, he went on, the scientists had been frightened by what they were doing. And a few weeks before the test at Los Alamos almost all of them had signed a petition to President Truman asking that the bomb not be used in combat until after it had been tested, publicly. Then, the petition had said, the

Japs should be informed of the results and warned that unless they surrendered, the bomb would be used against them.

"But we didn't get very far with that," one of them said. Then he smiled, rather hopelessly, "As I guess you realized the other night."

"And as I guess we'll realize again tonight," I added.

"Yes," the young scientist said. "I know what you mean."

And how about the Japs, I wanted to know, wasn't it possible that they'd make a bomb, and if they did, would they hesitate to use it on us?

"There's a very simple answer to that one," he continued. "They haven't got the material to make one."

"Oh," I said, then again, "Oh. I see." What the scientists had said didn't make for cheerful thoughts during the last hours before a mission, but there it was, and what were you going to do about it. In a way, I was glad I'd talked to them because when they'd first arrived at Tinian, there'd been a lot of griping. Why weren't they in the Army? Why weren't they drafted? Why were they making so much money? Why weren't they going on any missions? Why didn't they get shot at?

It was the usual kind of talk, the kind of thing you always say about young civilians when you're in the Army and there's a war on. But that night I understood, for the first time. I understood it even better when I read a story in the *New York Times* by William Laurence, a carelessly dressed, soft-spoken little man who flew over Nagasaki in Major Hopkins' ship.

"It is a thing of beauty, this 'gadget,'" he wrote. "Into its design went millions of man hours of what is without doubt the most concentrated intellectual effort

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in history. Never before has so much brainpower been focused on a single problem."

It was just a matter of doing your job, I guess. The scientists had theirs, and they didn't like it much. And our crew had ours, and most of us didn't like that much either. I guess you're not supposed to like what you have to do during a war. And the answer is probably not to find a cushy job, because there aren't any, really. The answer is just not to have any wars, period.

The briefing was slow in getting started, and it wasn't as tense and dramatic as the one before the Hiroshima raid. I think everybody on our crew was more frightened, really downright terrified, than we had been the first time, but, after all, we were, in a sense, veterans now, and even though the bomb we were to carry was "slightly larger and much more efficient, much more," we didn't feel we had to be Superman this time.

"I don't believe it," Ray whispered to me when the intelligence officer mentioned the "more efficient" part. "I don't think it's possible." Neither did I.

As before there would be three ships. Captain Bock would fly on our right wing with the instrument ship, to make the important official recordings, and Major Hopkins would be on our left. The photographs would be made from his ship. The weather ships would leave an hour before and send us their reports approximately an hour before the estimated time of "bombs away."

There were two young officers from the Navy present, and again they told us about the superdumbos and the subs that would be hovering not too far from shore and, over and over again, emphasized how easy it is to make an air-sea rescue and gave us numerous examples of crews that had been rescued, well, four or five examples anyway.

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"I think they made the whole thing up," said Buckley, so loud that one of the Navy officers looked straight at him and frowned.

"No," I answered. "It's like a Gallup poll; nobody's ever met anybody who was interviewed in a Gallup poll. Same thing; we never heard of anybody who's been rescued."

"I don't believe in the Gallup poll either," said Ray.

"That's about all," the young Navy officer, who looked like a man in an Arrow shirt ad (as almost all young Navy officers do), concluded. "If you follow instructions, there's nothing to worry about. Nothing at all to worry about."

"Goodie, goodie," said Ed. "He has nothing to worry about. Of course, he's not coming along. Maybe if he were coming along, he'd have plenty to worry about. And maybe if I weren't going along, you wouldn't hear that loud noise indicating that my knees are knocking together."

When the specialized briefing ended, we had an hour's wait until the regular pre-flight briefing, at 0030. We had late chow and then returned to our hut until it was time to leave.

Ray didn't say a word in more than an hour, which was strange for him. Usually, he's the talkative one. He lay on his bunk, face down.

"What's the matter, kid?" I asked him.

He didn't reply. "Come on, Ray, everything'll be all right. It always is. This is just another mission. So what if the stuff is hot? We're the best damned crew there is. Why worry?"

"Abe," he said slowly, "make a record of it and find out who you're kidding. You aren't even kidding yourself."

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I shut up. About the only one of us that even acted calm was Dehart. He shined his shoes, careful and easy and slow.

"It's like that Navy officer said," he commented, not once but two or three times. "There's nothing to worry about. If they got your number, they got your number. And if they haven't, they haven't. There's not a thing in the world to worry about." Funny thing is, I believe "Pappy" really meant it.

We'd just got up a game of poker and played maybe a hand or two when it was time for the regular briefing.

Some of the men on the other crews had been drinking, I guess; none of us had, but there was the smell of liquor in the room, and some of them looked a little glassy-eyed, and, when the intelligence officer got up, a couple of guys began laughing—and couldn't stop.

The target, first: Kokura, primary; Nagasaki, secondary. The axis of approach, the route in, route out, air-sea rescue again, what the enemy might have in store for us, and that might be, probably would be plenty; we would pass over Kagawa in making our approach to Kokura, and that was the hottest spot in the Empire, at least one of the two or three hottest. And then a little time with the maps and photographs, all of them blown up as large as possible and very detailed.

And after intelligence, communications, the usual, the fact that there would be radio silence, no direct communication with the base, the same as before.

The weather report came next, and it was discouraging. It would be rough going all the way up, so rough that probably, although nobody said it, an ordinary mission wouldn't take off in the first place. But as we neared the target, things would pick up. It ought to be all right. Hell, it had to be all right over the target;

we would bomb visually. Not by radar. And that was an order.

Take-off as scheduled; our rendezvous point is Yakoshima, at approximately 0915. From there to the target in formation, not much of a formation, you'll admit. Three ships compared to the usual 600 or 1,000. But a real formation, boys, just for the records.

The chaplain said the same things as before, and it was the same chaplain, and he said them as well as usual. But tonight I didn't feel like praying. I'd done all the praying necessary during the last few days. It was as "Pappy" said; they either have your number or they don't. And there isn't much you can do about it. God knew how I felt about the matter. I'd told Him how I felt several times on the way to and over and back from Hiroshima. I didn't think He'd be interested in hearing it all over again, and I wasn't interested in saying it.

The trucks would be ready at 0115 to take us to the ships, the intelligence officer said, and, that's all. As we rose to leave, he raised his voice and said, loudly as if he'd just thought of it, "And, oh yes, fellows, all the luck in the world." No God bless you? No, none. Just again, "All the luck."

Buckley said a very short, dirty word. There was no need for it, but I understood how he felt.

Back to the hut to collect our gear, nobody talking now at all. "Aren't we the cheerful little bunch," Kuharek cracked. No answer, not even an attempt at a smile. When we'd gathered up our gear, we sat on the edges of our bunks, looking long-faced and solemn. I don't think we'd exchanged a half dozen words when the trucks came to take us to the line.

As we went toward the ship, we all took one long and, we thought perhaps last, look at our hut.

"Isn't a bad place to live, compared to some," Ray philosophized.

"Depends on what you're comparing it with," said Buckley. "Compared to a farm house in Ohio, now, it isn't much."

"Shut up," said Ray. Buckley shut up.

Chapter Nine

AS soon as we reported to the plane, the tension lifted. It always does; I don't know why, unless it's that there's something comforting and comfortable doing familiar things, performing your job and doing it well.

It wasn't raining yet, but every few minutes there'd be a flash of lightning or a bolt of thunder. We'd been expecting a suicide raid every since Hiroshima, and the night before, while I slept, I guess, there'd been two alerts, but still no sign of a raid. Not even an observation plane.

It was a little after 0200 when we arrived at the ship, and the field this time was dark. We were to have blinker lights for taxi instructions, and now only our own landing lights and a few runway lights were turned on.

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A handful of men from the other crews were waiting around to wish us luck, plus the photographer and Major Monyhan, the public relations officer. Pictures were taken of the crew, the ship and some of the scientists and the brass. Plus the one newspaper man, Bill Laurence, the science reporter of the *New York Times* who'd written the first stories on the bomb for the War Department and was to be on Bock's ship.

I think it was Major Monyhan who noticed that we had the number 77 on our ship, to take the place of the name. Our usual number was 89. "Seventy-seven's the same number Red Grange used to have when he was making eight or ten touchdowns a game," Monyhan said. "Probably a lucky number."

"Nice, but we won't need it," Major Sweeney replied. "We got nothing to worry about. We've got the best damned crew in the Air Force."

He sounded confident and cocky, and just hearing him talk made me feel better.

At exactly 0330 we got the order to climb aboard. The guys who'd come down to see us off shook some of our hands, pretty solemnly, I thought, and winked and grinned.

"Give the little bastards our regards," they said.

"Don't worry," I answered. "See you soon."

"I'll save a drink for you, Abe," one of them replied. "I'll save a lot of drinks."

"Thanks. I'll be needing them."

And then, "Take care of yourself, old man, and good luck."

I just winked; that was all. I was choked up inside, and a flash of lightning had broken nearby, and it looked like rain at any minute.

As an extra precaution against a surprise raid, radio communications between ourselves and the tower had been cut off. There was nothing for me to do at the moment except sit tight, like a paying passenger.

The props were turned, and we tensed up for the take-off. In the rear were "Pappy," Ray, Buckley and Lieutenant Jacob Beser, of Baltimore, a youngster (he was 24) who was an expert in airborne radar.

On the forward deck were nine of us, lined up like this: airplane commander, Sweeney; co-pilot, Albury; bombardier, Beahan; third pilot, Olivi; navigator, Van Pelt; flight engineer, Kuharek; radio operator, myself, and Commander Ashworth, the Navy technician, and Harold Barnes, his assistant, and myself.

The first engine turned over, as easy as if it were just starting a short run to circle the field, purring like a contented cat.

"Okay on Number One, major," Kuharek yelled.

Then it was Two, Three, finally Four, all simple, all easy. Nothing could turn us back now. It was 0335.

Kuharek's voice again. "Major, major!" He sounded excited. One of the instruments showed that we might not be able to get at the gas which was stored in the bomb bay tanks. The major stepped out of the plane for a minute and called to Colonel Tibbets. They talked for a minute, maybe a minute and a half, and while they were gone, I kept thinking, still and always, that maybe there was a chance that something would happen. Maybe we couldn't take off for, say, a day, just twenty-four hours, and by that time it wouldn't be necessary to take off.

But I was dreaming, of course. They figured it out, and the major stepped back in the plane.

"Roger," he said. "All set."

We began taxiing out, slowly; my wrist watch showed exactly 0345. On the nose. The brakes were released, the throttles advanced. I took a last fleeting look at the bomb nestling cozily behind me, turned to look at my wife's picture and with a wave of my hand and a "We're on our way again, Hon," strained forward to watch the needle on the speedometer—100—110—120. Normally, at 120 mph., we're supposed to leave the ground, but we didn't. The wheels hadn't lifted an inch. I could hear the major swearing, and again I glanced back at the bomb, looking harmless and peaceful, and I thought, Oh, God, if we crash with that thing, there won't be any pieces to worry about. Plane or people. Nothing. Not even an island, probably. Just a bubble in the sea where Tinian had been.

The speedometer again. 130 mph. 135 mph. There was only a small stretch of runway left, and the ocean straight ahead of us and looking turbulent and stormy . . . waiting for us. It had happened before, planes just moving straight into the sea off this runway. And once, only once, had they even found any bodies. There's practically no more runway, well, this is the end,—and then I felt the wheels lift. We were in the air and there wasn't any runway left.

Maybe nobody else in the world sweats out a take-off; maybe everybody does. I don't know. It's the kind of thing you never discuss with anybody. All I know is that I sweat them all out, and if I flew every day for fifty years, I still would. I never quite believe we'll get in the air until we do. And that time I'd been sure we wouldn't, couldn't possibly.

There've probably been very few take-offs in history as close as that one, not when anybody lived to tell about it, that is.

I took out a dry handkerchief, returned it to my pocket, soaking wet, and then settled down to the trip ahead, wondering what the others were thinking, if they'd been as frightened as I. This was as good a time as any to find out.

Radio to left blister: What's on your mind, Ray?

Ray: Notice those angels back there? They were waving at us. And winking. One of them was very pretty, too. Built a little like Lana Turner.

Radio: Nothing to worry about, kid. In twenty-four hours this'll be just a pleasant little memory.

Ray: A memory maybe. But let's not kid ourselves. Not pleasant. It'll never be pleasant.

Radio: Hey, Ed, how about you?

Ed: Look, I never believed in angels or in Santa Claus. Not even when I was a kid I didn't, but when we come back from this one, I'll believe in both of them, and anything else anybody wants to tell me. I'll be the believingest guy and the happiest guy and the uncomplainingest guy in the world. If we get back, I mean.

No reply from radio to that one, except: Yeah. Me, too.

Radio: Hey, Pappy! How you doing?

Dehart: There are days when it doesn't pay to get out of bed, all kinds of days when it doesn't pay to get out of bed, but there's never been a time when it paid less to get out of bed than it would have today.

Radio: Ah, don't worry.

Dehart: Oh, I'm not worried, but if I mumble a little you'll know it's because it's a little tough to talk with my heart in my mouth.

In the forward compartment Van Pelt was checking his maps and charts, looking like a handsome college senior cramming for an examination. Beahan was arranging a pillow for a comfortable bed. Unconcerned, unworried Beahan; he'd probably sleep all the way there—and back too, if we came back, that is. Nothing ever worries Beahan, not that anybody knows about anyway.

Sweeney and Albury were fussing with the controls, and Olivi was sitting on the floor; there was nothing for him to do, except rest, and he was good at that, as who wasn't. Ashworth and Barnes were toying with the electrical units of the bomb, talking low and confidential as if there were at least eight Jap spies in the ship trying to hear every word they said.

On the log in front of me, I began recording the beginning of the flight.

Now there was nothing to do but wait. We had a long way to go and no pretty hostess to smile and bring us hot coffee.

Olivi suddenly began singing, loud, his voice easily carrying over the sound of the motors.

"Oh, give me a home where the buffaloes roam," and on and on.

We glared at him, all of us, and Sweeney glanced up and shouted, "Why don't you shut the hell up?"

But it wasn't an order, and Olivi kept right on singing, and, as a matter of fact, it was rather pleasant. Not tuneful. But pleasant. A reminder of other times and other places when we'd heard the same song.

I remembered once, at a place called "Rudy's Rail" on Third Avenue in New York. Not long after Esta and I first met, and we'd stopped there to dance and have a beer. . . . Years ago, but I could still remember the night. . . . Like yesterday. . . . The orchestra had played that song. . . .

Chapter Ten

OLIVI was sleeping now, and so was Beahan, snoring a little too, and I was chewing some gum Major Sweeney had found in his pocket and passed around. Every once in a while I took out my wallet and looked at Esta's picture, and she kept smiling and smiling at me; she wasn't worried; she was completely confident.

I don't know how much time had passed, about an hour, I think, when the storm broke. It began pouring rain, sheets of it, not drops, accompanied by lightning and thunder and wind. The plane bobbed up and down, almost completely helpless, now dropping as much as a hundred feet, now rising. Sweeney tried to get above the soup, then below; both were impossible. I turned on the radio, but the air was filled with static, and the Japs were doing a good job of jamming, too.

Nobody was asleep any more; that was an impossibility. Beahan had sat up and calmly lighted a cigarette; Van Pelt was hunched over his charts, chewing on the top of his pencil, once in a while biting his finger nails, trying to look calm and unconcerned, but he wasn't.

The other two ships were nowhere in sight, and I, at least, felt as if we were completely alone, a plane load of men lost in the middle of the Pacific. It happened;

all the time it happened, even on the big raids, hundreds of bombers flying in formation to their target and back. One would fail to return, and a bed or two in one of the huts would be empty. Then they'd come down from headquarters and pick up the gear of whoever it belonged to and put someone else in the empty bunk immediately. And you hardly ever mentioned the fact of the change or what had happened to the man who had slept there. You just pretended nothing had happened. Or once in a while, if he'd been a close friend, you wrote a letter to his folks, trying to say something comforting, although there was never really much to say.

And now I kept wondering what kind of letters somebody would write for me—and to whom and what they'd say, and every time the ship bobbed again, I'd take out Esta's picture.

You bet I was frightened, and you bet I promised myself that if I ever got back from this one, I'd never fly again. There are some men who don't feel that way, Sweeney, for instance, and Albury and Beahan. I'd heard them talking lots of times, saying how they didn't see how infantrymen could stand it, fighting on the ground, the dirt and the routine and the taking it day-after-day. Them, they'd take their chances in the air, any time, any place.

Some men—and I guess they are three of them—are at home in the air; they're born that way, I guess. And some men aren't and never will be; they're born that way, too. I am one of the latter. I enjoyed flying, yes, but, for a regular thing, I'd take the ground every time when it came to fighting. On the ground, you could duck when you saw something coming your way; at least you thought you could, and always you had the feeling your life was in your own hands, even if it wasn't; you didn't have to worry about whether someone else pulled the right switch or pushed the right button. And certainly you didn't have to worry about a dangerous bomb in the back seat that you felt with every dip might possibly maybe blow you and your ship to hell and back.

The storm was at its worst and blackest when suddenly, without any warning, we were out of it, and it was calm again, and there were even a few stars to be seen peeking through the black clouds.

At 0500 there was the slightest sliver of light to the east of us, and then minutes later it was dawn, and the sun was creeping up over the horizon.

On my desk was an old copy of *Reader's Digest;* somebody'd apparently brought it along on a previous mission and thrown it there. It was dated March 1942, and I'd read every article before, but I read them all again, all except the ones about the war. In the back was a book condensation, *Our Hearts Were Young and Gay*, it was called, and I read that twice and started it a third time because it all took place quite a few years ago and was about two girls who had nothing to worry about except having a good time. I didn't glance at my watch once; I almost persuaded myself that I was in Paris, and nobody around'd ever heard of a war or a B-29, and God knows, certainly not an atomic bomb.

"I spent two hours that way, maybe more; I don't know exactly when I began, but when I looked up, the sun was shining, and the sky was a magnificent blue, and through the clouds the water below was the same color.

It was a little after 0700, and Sweeney warned me to be on the alert for the weather report. Which would it be? Kokura or Nagasaki? The report would tell.

The minutes ticked by quickly now because my ears were strained for that all-important message. The Japs were still doing a good job of jamming our frequencies, but today, strangely enough, I was calmer about it. I'd gone through this once. The second time of anything is easier.

A half hour passed, an hour, an hour and a half. My ears were still strained for that report. At 0834 we began climbing to our bombing altitude, and still no report, and the jamming was getting worse. Even if it did come through, I might not be able to decipher it through all that static.

Then my heart skipped at least one beat, maybe more. "Pappy" reported an unidentified plane in the distance.

"For God's sake," I said, "what is it?"

"Pappy" didn't answer for a minute. "Hold it," he said. "Hold it." Then, very calm, very collected.

"Okay. Relax. It's a '29."

It was our right-wing plane.

"Jesus God!" said Barnes. "I don't mind telling you—"

"Shut up," I shouted at him. "Keep quiet."

Something was coming in; it was very faint through the static and the jamming. They repeated it twice, and I still wasn't sure. Then it came again. The weather was good. That was it. Weather good. Primary target recommended for bombing. Kokura it was.

A minute later, Nagasaki was reported clear, too. I passed the word along to the major.

"Good boy, Abe," he said. "We're cooking with gas."

By this time we were over the coast, and it looked as peaceful as last time. The little towns like any little towns anywhere at that hour of the morning, fresh and

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peaceful and still. We reached Yakoshima at 0909. We'd lost the right wing plane, and we circled for maybe ten minutes before it showed up again. Then more waiting, for the third ship. About ten minutes longer. Circling a town like that for two minutes is a hundred and twenty seconds too long. What did they think down there, that we were playing tag? Didn't we have anything to do? Any place to go? Nothing to do but wait.

We played tag for almost forty-five minutes, sweating out Major Hopkins, pilot of the third ship. He knew where the rendezvous point was as well as we did. Where the hell was he? Had they stopped off for a short beer some place? Or was it the storm? Maybe they hadn't got through the storm this morning.

Finally, and it was at the right minute; none of us could have stood that nerve-wracking waiting much longer, Major Sweeney said, "Okay, we'll take off," and he banked the ship, and we were headed to the east toward the city we thought we were about to obliterate.

As we flew the weather began getting worse again. We were all keyed-up now—and alert. The air seemed to be charged with electricity, broken only once or twice with a word from Ray or "Pappy."

"Everything's fine here," Ray would say, "Like Sunday morning at church."

Or "Pappy": "I still don't think these damned a-er-o planes are here to stay."

We'd wasted a lot of gasoline over Yakoshima, and there was no time to lose now. We had to drop the "gimmick" and drop it fast and get the hell back.

Buckley and Van Pelt were busy lining up the target through the radar scope. I switched on the interphone again. Kuharek just watched the instrument panel, searching for some tiny clue that anything was wrong.

Then Van Pelt to Sweeney, navigator to pilot: Two degrees right, one degree left.

Buckley, radar: I have it in range. What's our true altitude?

Navigator: Give me one degree left, Sweeney. . . . Hold it; hold it. Fine. Good. We're right on course.

Pilot: Roger! All you men make damned sure you have your goggles on; I don't want any blind men on my crew.

We adjusted our goggles, but it was too crowded on deck to bother with flak suits. Three minutes passed, and we were on our axis of attack. I had my fingers crossed; oh, God, how I had my fingers crossed. We couldn't afford to make more than one run. And that one had to be good.

There were clouds scattered below, grey clouds which at lazy intervals hid the ground. But our radar approach was on the button, bringing us right in to the target.

And now it was Beahan's turn. Would he be able to see his objective? It had to be visual, boy; have to have sharp eyes, boy; get good, boy. The captain, as always, looked cool, cocky and confident. He grinned. We were three minutes out now.

Buckley: Twenty miles out, captain. Mark.

Van Pelt: Roger. Give me two degrees left, Sweeney.

Sweeney: You got it, boy.

The bomb bay doors opened; it took only an instant but seemed longer, seemed minutes, seemed hours.

Two minutes out. I wished I had something to do, a screw to turn, a button to push, something to say. Anything to take my mind off the goddamned waiting; nothing could be worse than just sitting there, thinking . . . wondering . . .

I tapped off each second. Only a minute now, sixty complete seconds remaining. My hand was over the switch, ready to give the signal which would inform our wing ship to drop its instruments. Thirty seconds away from the target. I raised my finger. Beahan was glued to the bomb sight, perspiring now, trying to line up the target. Fifteen seconds . . . Fourteen . . .

It would soon be ended. Kokura would soon be gone, a smoking mass of debris, of dead and dying . . .

Then, "Goddamnit to hell." It was Beahan. "No drop! No drop!" He was yelling, almost hysterically. "I can't see the goddamned target; there's a goddamned cloud over the goddamned, goddamned target."

We could almost have said it in harmony. We all said approximately the same thing in the same way. "Goddamn it to hell," we said. And more and worse.

We'll have to make another pass, another goddamned pass, and we'll be directly over Ywata, the heavily fortified city next door and one of the hottest spots in the Empire, the city over which we'd lost not one bomber but dozens. They had ack-ack there, and the boys on the ground knew how to use it.

Goddamnit. There'd be fighters, too, now; many fighters, hundreds of them, at any second. And our gas supply was low. Oh, ducky. Oh, wonderful. Oh, we're really on the beam this morning. If our chances were a hundred to one five minutes ago, they're a thousand to one now—against us.

"Bock's still with us," "Pappy" reported. "He's right on our tail." Well, that's two of us anyway; two heads are better, two planes are better than one. Like hell.

Here we go again, at a different angle of approach. Ever hear about men whose hair turned white over night? Meet the new champ. Abe Spitzer. His hair turned white in ten minutes.

Over, over, slow and easy, over, over the target now, and Beahan is still sweating. And then, again, "No drop! No drop! Clouds still obscure the target. No drop."

Why in God's name can't we drop it by radar? It's lined up by radar. Drop it now and get the hell out of here. Sweeney could do it—or Ashworth. Either could countermand the goddamned orders. Let's get rid of it and get the hell out of here.

Then Sweeney's voice. "Sit tight, boys; we're going around again."

We sat tight. We sat very tight indeed. Nobody ever sat tighter than we did. I cursed under my breath, and I cursed aloud, and I didn't care who heard, and I perspired, too, and I wondered what the hell would happen if we all bailed out now and the hell with the plane and the hell with the bomb and the hell with the war. The hell with everything. Let's get out of here.

Now it was "Pappy's" turn to add his little note of cheer. "A few bursts of flak, major."

Good! Good! Sweeney'll surely turn around now and hightail it out of here.

Only Sweeney didn't. Sweeney said, "Roger, keep your eyes open, 'Pappy'."

Was the major crazy? Had he suddenly gone stark, raving mad? And where were "Pappy's" eyes? "A few bursts of flak," hell. There were at least a million bursts of flak or a billion or more. I wouldn't have wanted to count how many, but it seemed to me that there was all the flak in the world, and most of it was close enough to reach out and touch, and the next burst, or the next, or the one after that would be the one with our number. And after that, so long, everybody, good bye, for now and forever.

We turned for a third time to make another run, and Buckley and Van Pelt were still getting excellent results with the radar, but the order was still for a visual bombing. For God's sake, why?

This time we came in from still a third direction. But it was hopeless. There were even more clouds now; they were increasing, not decreasing. And so was the flak. And the weather was getting worse. And our gas supply was getting lower.

"What's wrong with Nagasaki?" I asked, aloud, although it was only a rhetorical question, strictly academic; I didn't expect an answer. "Let's try Nagasaki," I said, but this time I whispered; I wasn't giving orders around here, unfortunately, for me and for everybody else.

Sweeney, Beahan and Ashworth talked it over, slow and deliberate, as if they had all the time in the world, as if that flak wouldn't hurt a fly, let alone a great big plane like ours. Plenty of time. They discussed the matter as if they were speaking about the number of angels that could dance on the head of a pin. And which angels? Some of the angels would surely include us, I thought.

Of course, we'd only been over enemy territory for about an hour; that's not long, not too long, not more than fifty-five minutes longer than we should have been.

But they talked it over. Should we try Nagasaki? What were the chances there? How would the weather be? Should we, perhaps, attempt a fourth run

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here? And a fifth? And sixth? Could we continue to enjoy the particular indulgence of the gods in this matter?

For all I know they'd still be talking, trying to make up their minds. And, of course, it was a momentous decision. I'm not denying that; nobody denies that.

But the Japs decided for all of us, made up all our minds very fast.

It was Dehart reporting. "Fighters below and climbing rapidly," he said. "Four of them. Climbing rapidly."

That did it. We got the hell out, and we turned as quickly as any plane ever turned, and we headed straight for Nagasaki. The fighters followed us a little way, and when I looked back I could still see the flak bursts; in fact, the whole sky seemed to be black with flak bursts, but they were in the distance now, and we didn't have to worry about them.

In fact, we didn't have a thing in the world to worry about except the fact that we were behind schedule, way behind, that the whole Japanese homeland was probably alerted now and waiting for us, that the weather was getting worse, and that we were low on gas and were still 350 miles away from Nagasaki and God knows how far from our base.

And there was the bomb, the goddamned bomb looking clean and smooth and smug. And innocent.

"How do you feel, Abe?" Buckley wanted to know.

"Would you mind shutting the hell up?" I replied.

"I feel the same way," he answered. "Only a little bit worse."

Chapter Eleven

I HAD a peculiar thought as we turned around and hightailed toward Nagasaki. It only lasted a moment then, but, as with so many of the thoughts I had on our two atomic missions, it's recurred many times since, and I've gone over it in my mind. And I don't know the answer yet—or anyone who does.

But I shivered when it first occurred to me, and I've shivered since. I took one last look at Kokura, nestling there between the long, low hills on either side, the houses looking neat and well-kept and lived in. And then I thought of the tens of thousands of people who did live in them, the old men and women and the children and the young wives whose husbands were probably away fighting somewhere.

Of course, they hadn't known what they'd escaped; they couldn't have. I'm convinced, as I've said, that the human mind can't really understand the bomb we carried, can't really know what it will do. If all of us did, if any large number of us did, why, there wouldn't be any more talk of war; there couldn't possibly be. People everywhere—if they understood—would demand that we find some way to avoid it, and if enough people felt that way, wars wouldn't happen. People—a lot of people—can get what they want, if they demand it loud enough and long enough.

I thought that, and I thought, too, that maybe when those people in Kokura had got up that morning they'd seen that the sky was cloudy and that it looked like rain and they'd wished for a sunny day, as people always do, all people everywhere, I imagine, even including the Japanese. But just that once, never again maybe, but that once they should have thanked God—and the Emperor—for the clouds.

Kuharek was busy now, checking the gas, and it was several minutes before he spoke. At least twice the major asked, "What's the score?," and each time Kuharek checked again. He knew, with the first check, what the score was, but he didn't want to say. It was a frightening score. Our side wasn't winning.

Finally, he swallowed hard and said, "Fifteen hundred gallons left, sir."

I heard the major whistle. "Damn," he said, and repeated, "damn." But he didn't seem in the least perturbed; he never did. It was as if Kuharek had said, "We have enough gas to fly to the moon and back, sir." But, deep down, he was disturbed, I know. I don't think he realized it, but I heard him whistle again, then say, almost inaudibly and under his breath, "Jesus." It was more of a prayer than a curse, but it was both at the same time.

Only 1,500 gallons. That wasn't even enough to get us back to Iwo, not nearly enough, and God knows it was out of the question to think of returning to Tinian. That was just about enough gas to take us right smack into the middle of nowhere, far away from the Navy rescue craft and the cruising rescue planes but nowhere near a base. Just enough, as I estimated it, to make it impossible for us to land anywhere except on the coast of the Empire itself, which would have made all the Japanese very happy indeed. They would welcome us with open arms, surely, and with open bayonets, and they would have many questions to ask us. And particularly, most particularly, they would be extremely curious about our bomb. They would want to take a good look at that bomb. It would be a very interesting sight to them.

The major thought a long time before he said anything. Finally, his voice a little tight and high-pitched: "Abe, send Commander Ashworth up here." He was still not showing that he was nervous, if, in fact, he was; he was simply indicating that he was tense. Only not as tense as the rest of us.

I passed the word along to the commander, and he went forward. He was the one who had to decide—and damned quick. There wasn't a moment to waste; he had to make up his mind about a question as serious as anybody's ever had put to him. It was simply this: what should we do about the bomb?

Suppose the target at Nagasaki was also obscured by clouds—and it very likely would be; they were getting thicker by the minute. Our orders were to drop visually, but—?

The major and the commander were in a huddle, and I listened in.

"Here's the deal," the major said. "We've got just enough fuel to make one pass over the target. Get that. One pass. If we don't drop it at Nagasaki, we may have to let it go in the drink. There's a slim chance that we might be able to make Okinawa with it still aboard, but the odds are damned slim."

"For God's sake," said the commander, and his face got white. "I mean for God's sake. What does that mean?"

"It means," the major replied, "that, if you agree, we ought to do a radar run. If we can't see the target."

The commander hesitated a full forty-five seconds, by my wrist watch; I timed him, and I didn't blame him for hesitating. I was glad it was someone else's responsibility. Not mine.

After what seemed a very long time, the commander said, speaking very slowly: "Let me think it over, Chuck."

"Mind you," the major went on, "I can't say for sure we'll have to get rid of it. I just say probably."

"Yeah," said the commander. "Yeah, I know."

He walked back, and his face was drawn; he had his hands behind him, clasping and unclasping them as he went. He sat down, deep in thought.

He didn't have long to make up his mind. We were getting close now, and we already had reduced our air speed to save fuel. Fifteen hundred gallons isn't much for a '29, not with the flight we still had ahead of us to get back to friendly territory, and we had even less than 1,500 that moment.

The commander strode up and down the flight deck once or twice, his face still looking old and tired. Finally, he walked back toward the major.

"We'll have to risk getting the bomb back to Okinawa," he said. "Our orders were that we weren't to make a radar drop. I'll have to carry out orders."

"Roger," said the major, but he wasn't pleased. None of us was. We didn't blame the commander. We knew about orders; you learn about orders in the Army and Navy. You learn quick if you're smart, and you never forget, not until you're out of it. Quite simply, we were a little afraid, hell, more than a little afraid, very much afraid of the idea of taking that bomb all the way back. It might be impossible. And making a water landing without the bomb was taking a slim enough chance. And even if we jettisoned everything detachable, there still was no guarantee that we'd survive a water landing. Either the plane or its occupants.

The chances were—frankly, I didn't think there were any chances, even one chance.

Buckley and Van Pelt were bringing us in on the target, working fast and doing a good job. We were five minutes away now, and every once in a while I'd glance at the commander. If ever I saw a man going through hell in his own mind, the commander was he. Of course, he was perplexed. He was a Navy man. What should he do? Did he dare use his own initiative and disregard orders? Let the bomb go anyway, visual or not? Or risk a return to Okinawa and at the same time jeopardize the lives of every man aboard, including his own? Or, perhaps, risk the possibility of dropping the bomb in the ocean? Nobody knew what that would mean. A tidal wave? It was possible.

Finally, he unclasped his hands, took a deep breath and strode forward, and when I heard what he said to the major, I knew he was a man with courage, real courage.

"I've changed my mind, Chuck," he said to the major, speaking with great emphasis. "We'll let it go over Nagasaki, visually, radar or what have you."

"I could kiss you," said the major. "A little later maybe I will." The rest of us cheered, and Albury patted the commander on the back.

"Atta boy," he said. "Atta boy, commander." The commander grinned like a five-year-old.

Two minutes out now. I kept my eyes on my watch again, sweating out each tick.

The bomb bay doors were opened again. Then, Beahan shouted, nervously: Damn it to hell, I can't see it this time either: I still can't see the target.

Sweeney: Look hard. Keep your eyes open, Honeybee.

Beahan: No luck. Not a bit of luck.

Sweeney: Okay, but check all your switches. Make damned sure everything is ready. We can't afford any more dry runs.

God no, no hold up, not this time.

One minute more, and we see the familiar black flak bursts. They wait until we're ready, I guess, until just enough time is left for them to save themselves. It's a game, and the Japs play it very well; they're perfect on the timing. More bursts, many more. Well, a half dozen at least, all of them uncomfortably close.

Ed and Van Pelt are nervously working on the radar, making last-minute adjustments. Then Beahan, triumphant, his voice booming out like a cannon.

"I've got it! Believe it or not, I've got it. There's a hole in the clouds; I can see the target." And he was laughing. Of all the times in the world, he was laughing, his big, hearty laugh.

"Yes, sir," he repeated. "I've got it."

Thirty seconds. My hand trembled on the signal tone. I flipped it on, pulled the goggles over my eyes and turned my head in.

Then Beahan raised his hand, and the ship rocked, ever so slightly as the bomb was away.

"Holy mother of Jesus," he said. "Holy mother of Jesus." And, "Never again. Never, never again."

I braced myself in my seat and waited. And a year passed, a decade, a century, an eon. All of them in less than a minute.

Chapter Twelve

WE LET go with the bomb at 12:01, August 9, 1945, an hour, a moment and a day to be remembered. Had the factory whistles at Nagasaki blown for lunch? Were families all over the city sitting down for a meal of rice and tea? Had classes at the schools been dismissed? Were the children running home, or loitering in the playgrounds? Had any large number of the people below looked up to the sky, seen the two dots that were our planes, shrugged and gone on about their business? Had the ack-ack crews loaded their guns for another round?

And for a second was time suspended for them below as it was for us above them? And did anyone have time to swallow a bite of food or walk an extra step or push a button or inhale or exhale?

What were those tens of thousands of people doing when they died? I wondered.

I did a lifetime of wondering in that fragment of a moment when we waited for the blast. And I've wondered since.

As soon as the bomb was off the ship went into a

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sharp turn, then a dive to pick up speed. Immediately a flash of light, more intense by far then the one at Hiroshima, filled the plane, crept into every corner, stole up under my goggles and forced my eyes open with its intensity. And again, the sky was filled with it, and all around there was nothing but the light, the light of a color I am unable to describe, partly purple, partly blue, with a touch of red and yellow. A combination of blended, bright colors no artist could paint —or ever has, at least—and no novelist could put it in words—or, again, has yet done.

The ship shuddered, once . . . twice . . . three times. Then a brief pause, then a fourth and a fifth blast rocked the ship, knocking some papers from my desk to the floor, nearly pushing me off my seat.

Sweeney levelled out the ship, and I was at the window again, my goggles in my hand, staring out, my eyes still blinking with the intensity of the light. How I got there I don't know. There I was, and I was looking out at a technicolor world and a technicolor sky.

The ball of fire was greater this time, wider and reaching higher into the sky, and the smoke was thicker and blacker and seemed to rise even more rapidly than it had at Hiroshima, and the colors, the browns, the purples, the greens, the yellows, the reds, were brighter. Huge rings of smoke, the circumference of which reached around most of the city, reached hungrily upward. There was another blast, a sixth, and this time the plane seemed to drop several hundred feet and rocked nervously from side to side.

"Hey, Abe," said Barnes, the commander's assistant, who was at my side, "we'd better get the hell out of here. That stuff is dangerous."

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"Tell it to Sweeney," I answered, and I wasn't gagging. The major may have heard me, or, more probably it was coincidence, but he kicked the plane over into another dive, and we pulled away. Just in time, not a second too soon to avoid colliding with the great column of smoke which now continued upward, on and on until we couldn't see the top of it any longer; then, as before, the top of the mushroom broke off, sharp and clean, and rushed up and away, and another, smaller mushroom was formed, and below, as we rushed away from the maelstrom, the fires reached toward us, hungrily, and the city was now completely obscured by the smoke, multi-colored, white and grey and black and brown, all at the same time, and the smoke extended far beyond the limits of the city itself, hiding everything from our view, even the port which had been filled with ships, many of them probably already loaded with troops.

"Olivi," I shouted, "lieutenant, get out the camera. Let's get some pictures of this." Olivi's hands fumbled with the camera, and what we got weren't very clear pictures; the negatives were foggy, like double-exposures, the kind you make for a gag at a party. Only this was no gag and no party. This was a double-exposure of death and destruction. And, looking at the picture, no one would ever laugh. No one would ever even smile.

Another blast, and the ship shuddered again.

"What's that, flak?" Olivi wanted to know.

"Heh," I said. "Heh, heh! Who's able to man a gun down there? Dead Japs,. maybe? Japs with wings?"

"Oh, yeah," Olivi answered. "I can see what you mean."

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We circled the area, just once, and fast; our speedometer showed 200, but it seemed to me we weren't moving at all; we appeared to be caught in a huge magnet, drawing us closer and closer to that still-rising column of smoke. The major pushed out the throttles; we were at top speed now, but still going slow. Crawling.

"I've never seen anything like it," said the commander. He paused, shuddered as if he'd had a sudden chill, then added, speaking with a strange, hesitant emphasis, "and I hope I never do again."

"I guess it's something we'll never forget," said Barnes who was just behind us. "I know I never will."

"Don't worry," I replied. "It'll stay with us, what we've just seen. I mean we don't have to worry about forgetting a single detail."

"No, I guess not," Barnes added, a peculiar, faraway look in his eyes. "I guess we won't have to worry about that."

We were speeding away now, but the smoke was still rising, and a second mushroom had broken off the column, and a third was rapidly forming again.

"Better get your report out, Abe," said Sweeney.

"Yeah, guess you're right. Better get my report out." I was a little dazed, from shock and fright and surprise. It was the greatest moment of my Army career, the first time—and the only one, I'm sure—when the whole world, hundreds, thousands, millions of people—were waiting for my report. Back at Tinian they had no idea what had happened to us; they may have thought—we found out later they had—that we'd never reached our destination. After all, we were two and a half hours overdue; we had spent close to two hours over the Empire dropping one bomb. No American plane had been over enemy territory for so long a period during the entire war. That we survived was, again, the luck of the gods. Or, more likely, the stupidity of the Japs. In any case, we'd set a second record that day, not only in dropping a bomb, but in sweating out the possibility of enemy action for a longer time than any crew in any theater of war—ever. We had, therefore, gained a double victory.

It was 1215 when I sent my long-to-be-remembered message. The mission was a success; the new, improved atomic bomb—"Fat Boy," it was called by the brass, to distinguish it from "Little Boy," which was the unofficial name of the first bomb—had succeeded. Nagasaki was obliterated. Thousands had died an instant death, and more thousands would die later, much later and much more painfully.

Kuharek was checking on the gas when I finished sending the message, looking glum and sour. The situation was critical; we might not have enough to make Okinawa.

I glanced at Van Pelt, our navigator; it was up to him, now, as, in fact, it always was. It was up to him to get us wherever we wanted to go—and back. He was a quiet, hard-working officer, never talking much, and when he did, usually smiling, then saying his words slowly, letting them come out with care, as if he'd weighed each syllable before he uttered it.

"It's up to you now, captain," I said.

"I know," he replied. "I know all about it," and he smiled with a confidence that I needed just then, that was necessary and important to all of us. A half-mile off our regular route, a few lost minutes, were all that were necessary. We'd never get back.

The captain picked up his pencil, wrinkled his brow and frowned as he put some figures on the paper in front of him. I watched him, hopefully, waiting for another encouraging word. He must have felt my eyes on his back because he looked up again.

"Don't worry, Abe," he said, his slight southern accent pronounced and more evident than usual. "We'll make it."

"Sure, captain," I answered. "Sure, we'll make it." I winked, and he winked back.

"We'll make it," he repeated, with an unusual emphasis. I wondered, for a minute, whom he was trying to convince, himself or me?

"We'd better cut down our speed," Kuharek said. "Way down."

We slowed down to a minimum.

"Abe," said the major. "Inform air-sea rescue that we're leaving the area. Give them our exact position."

"Roger," I said. It would be ironic, I thought; it would be a good joke, a great laugh for somebody (God knows who) if after escaping that inferno back there, we were to be lost at sea, were to go down on the easiest part of the mission, our return. It would be a very funny joke that nobody would laugh at.

I messaged wing back at Tinian that we were heading for Okinawa because of lack of fuel, then informed Okinawa itself. For an hour and a half I sweated, sending messages, encoding, decoding, copying. Everyone else was sitting on his duff, nobody sleeping now and nobody talking, but everybody sweating with me. Ashworth continued pacing up and down, and once Olivi started humming again, and Buckley, I think it was, shouted, "For God's sake, shut up."

The lieutenant looked up at him with a peculiar

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grin, started to say something but then shut up tight. A few minutes later he whistled maybe two bars; Buckley just glared, and Olivi was quiet. I sympathized with the lieutenant; he was trying to quiet his nerves. Some people like to make a lot of noise when they're nervous, including me. I wanted to shout. Buckley, on the other hand, usually just froze when he was nervous; so did the commander. None of us had any comment to make just then.

The hours spent on the return trip passed slowly. I counted each minute as it passed, watched the second hand on my watch circle each time, and wondered. And hoped.

I don't think any of us exchanged more than half a dozen sentences. Once or twice the major looked back over his shoulder.

"Everything all right?" he'd ask.

"Sure," we'd answer, some of us would; others would merely nod. "Yeah," we'd continue, lying in our teeth, "everything's fine."

Once we ran into a slight storm, a few minutes of wind and thunder and rain, and we sweated out each bounce of the ship, each tiny rise and fall. Then, it was clear again, and the sun was shining, and below the water was blue and looked warm and inviting. Too deceivingly warm for comfort, too goddamned inviting.

Still, I was surprised when, looking down, I saw we were circling Okinawa. And I breathed my silent relief. Then I heard the major calling the control tower for landing instructions. No answer. He called again, and there was something very like anger in his voice.

"Tower, any goddamned tower. This is Dimples 77; emergency. Come in. Please come in." No answer.

Again. A fourth time and a fifth and a sixth. Still no reply.

"Abe," he said, "try your set. Hurry up. Be quick about it." He sounded brisk and angry, and I understood how he felt. I tried; the result was the same. Not a peep.

We'd been circling for twenty minutes now, and our gauge showed we had practically no gas left. We tried the distress call—"May Day." No luck. No reply. No sound. Not a thing except the whirr of four motors eating up gasoline by the second and no gasoline for them to eat.

The major ran his hand through his short brown hair. "I don't know," he said to nobody in particular. "I honest to God don't know."

There were planes all over the sky, dozens of them, and below dozens more, taking off, landing. Crowding the field. It would be difficult if not impossible to make a landing.

"Major," Kuharek said. "About the gas, I don't know—"

"All right, for God's sake," Sweeney said. "All right. We're going down, tower or no tower."

"Yes, sir," Kuharek replied.

"Olivi," the major shouted. And the lieutenant leaped to his feet. "Get out the goddamned flares and start shooting them when I give you the signal."

We made one final appeal to the tower, both the major and I. No luck. Nothing.

And then we started our approach and the lieutenant let go with the flares, red, green, white, several at a time, a Fourth of July celebration for five minutes. One after another as fast as we could load and fire. The smell of smoke permeated the entire plane, and in the back Gallagher thought we were on fire.

"And I didn't care much," he told me later. "At that point I didn't care about a thing."

The runway was below us and directly in front. We were coming very fast and very hot, and we could see the fire engine and the ambulance—the "meat wagon," we called it—waiting for us.

"Brace yourself, boys," said the major. Mathematically calculated, there was one chance in—say, a hundred, a thousand perhaps, a million maybe—that we could do it, could land safely without colliding with another ship. We came in fast and hard and sharp.

The wheels hit the ground. I don't know how fast we were going, much, much too fast for a landing. The major pushed a button, and the props were reversed. We slowed down now—fast.

Bless those reversible props. Bless, bless that ground, that wonderful, beautiful ground. We stopped just short of the end of the runway. The major switched off the engines, and we sat there a full minute, I think, before anyone opened the doors, and nobody said a word aloud. But, again, each of us said plenty of "Thank Gods" to ourselves.

A captain came running toward us, and, after he'd opened the door, leaned inside, excited and out of breath.

"You all right?" he shouted. "Anybody hurt? Anything wrong?"

"We're fine," the major answered. "Nobody's hurt. Nothing's wrong. We're just fine."

Ray measured the gas before we left the ship. We had enough for exactly five minutes of flying, no more, no less. The time was 1400.

"A little close," said Ray, "that's cutting it a little close."

I wished somebody then had called us the "Glory Boys." I was hoping somebody would make a crack, any kind of crack. I'd have committed murder, I think, right then and there, and I'd have had a crew of accomplices.

Luckily, nobody said anything, except for the captain.

"You heard the news?" he asked.

"I think so," the major answered. "I think we know all about the news." His lips were in a straight, tight line, and his voice was rough, like sandpaper.

"Russia's declared war on Japan," said the captain. "And, oh yeah, a couple of hours ago they dropped another atomic bomb. On Nagasaki."

"No kidding," said the major. "On Nagasaki. Well, I'll be a son of a bitch."

"We'll all be sons of bitches," said Buckley. "Won't we, fellows?"

"Yeah," we echoed. "We'll all be sons of bitches."

And we started for the mess hall. We were hungry sons of bitches.

Chapter Thirteen

NOBODY paid much attention to us on Okinawa. We were just another combat crew, tired, hungry and dirty. While the ship was being serviced, we wandered over to the clean, white mess hall and reported that we were hungry.

The mess sergeant was surly, an Old Army man, I knew, complaining and finding fault.

"Why the hell you combat guys can't ever get to chow on time, I'll never know," he spluttered.

Ray's face got alternately red and white, and he clenched and unclenched his fists.

"We were busy," he said, "just a little busy. Nothing much really, just a little bit occupied."

The sergeant, who had dirty, yellowish white hair, lost his temper. "Busy," he said, "busy. I'm busy eighteen to twenty hours a day. Been busy for twenty-five years, and I always get to my meals on time."

"Ever been on a mission, sarge?" Buckley asked.

"Never," the sergeant replied. "Absolutely not. I'm an infantryman myself, don't believe in the goddamned Air Corps. I was in France in the last war, and we knew how to fight a war then."

"I see," said Ray, "and we don't."

"Bunch of drafted jerks, that's what the Army is right now. The Regular Army'd be better off without them." He said "them," but he obviously meant "you"—us.

"I'm willing to let the Regular Army do it," said Ray. "Come on, boys, let's get the hell home. Let's let the Regular Army win the war. All by itself. Okay?"

We nodded, even Kuharek. He was angrier than any of us, I think, but he said nothing.

The sergeant finally produced a balogna sandwich for each of us, a thick piece of cold, greasy meat on a thicker piece of at least day-old bread, and half-warm coffee. That was our first meal since the midnight before.

"Wonderful food, sergeant," said Ray. "This is really wonderful food. You're a fine cook, really fine."

"If you don't like it," the sergeant began, "you know what—."

"Yes," Ray replied. "We know what we can do."

We had nearly finished eating when an excited, out-of-breath soldier wearing nothing but shorts burst into the mess hall.

"Hey," he said, "you guys hear about how they dropped another one of those atom bombs on the Japs?"

"No," we said, pretending curiosity, "tell us about it."

"Wiped out the whole damned city," he said. "The whole damned city."

The sergeant sniffed, audibly. "A lot of goddamned nonsense," he said. "It's the infantry that'll still have to whip the Japs. Might as well send the goddamned Air Corps back where it came from."

We rose quietly and wandered back to the ship, which was being gassed for the flight back.

"There's something about the Regular Army I love," said Ray.

Kuharek said nothing, but he was still angry, too, and, I imagine, still hungry. We all were.

At 1700 we took off for Tinian, and, as I looked down at the tiny blob of green that was Okinawa, I couldn't help wondering where the mess sergeant had been when the Marines were taking the island. Nowhere around, I imagined. Not available at that moment. And again, as so often, I felt that blind, unreasoning and unreasonable hatred of the Army. I probably needed to blow off a little mental steam just then.

The long flight back—we arrived at the base around 2300—was quiet and monotonous, delightfully so. The engines purred; there was plenty of gas; we had eaten enough to still the hunger pangs, and I think all of us were certain that we had dropped our last bomb. We talked about Russia, the usual things, the fact that she was coming in late; some said to share the spoils of the Pacific war which, after all, the Americans had won—single-handed, some said; others, Ashworth among them, pointing out that the Chinese had helped quite a little and the British and the Australians and, someone said, hadn't the Russians done the bulk of the fighting in Europe? And so on and on. Anything to keep on talking; otherwise, we'd have fallen asleep at our jobs.

We kidded Beahan some on what a hell of a way he'd spent his 27th birthday, and he didn't laugh about it much. He agreed and said he hoped he'd never have another one like that.

"But, of course," he said, "I'm staying in the Army after it's over."

"You never had it so good," cracked Commander Ashworth.

"I suppose that's partly true," said Beahan. "God knows I probably wouldn't be making as much money if I were a civilian, not at my age. But that's not it. I like flying, I guess. Besides, after today, it's going to take a lot to excite me very much. I mean I don't think I'd like the routine of being a civilian. Not after today."

We understood what he meant.

When we arrived at Tinian, there were cameramen waiting for us and more pictures. Any other time I suppose I'd have been thrilled with the idea. I was a big shot now. For a day or so I'd be famous. People all over the country would know my name and what I looked like and what I'd done. The rest of the crew, as well as myself, I mean.

But tonight I was just too exhausted. I didn't care. I really didn't care.

After that take-off, those gruelling hours in the air, that flak at Kokura, the explosion over Nagasaki, and the fact that we almost didn't make Okinawa, I'd have given up all the fame to have missed even one of those. Besides, the fame didn't last very long.

Back at the hut, we stayed awake, however, drinking from another bottle of whiskey that the officers'd dug up and given to us.

It was just 0345 when we went to bed. A good many years had passed in the last twenty-four hours.

It was 1000 when I awakened. Since no mission was scheduled, the weather, of course, was magnificent, even a little cool, the sun just warm enough to be pleasant, and a touch of breeze rustling the few trees on the island.

The radio was blaring, as it did consistently those last days, and the news was encouraging. Not definitive. Just encouraging. The Japs had called a conference of their cabinet and industrial leaders; that was the rumor, at least, and surrender was reported as inevitable—if the Allies agreed to let the Emperor continue to sit on his shaky little throne. But that was only rumor, international rumor.

The rumors on the island were much more interesting, to me anyway, and a lot more personal. Someone —a private first-class we listened to in the mess hall— had talked to someone who had talked to someone who had listened to a broadcast alleging that the Japs had their own atomic bomb, that they knew where the 393rd was stationed, and that *their* first bomb would be dropped on us. Probably, said the private first-class, "sinking the whole damned island right in the Pacific." It was a foolish rumor. I didn't believe it, not really; the scientists had told us that the Japs couldn't possibly make bombs. Still, I couldn't be sure, not sure enough for comfort. And ever since the first raid, we had expected, had been warned to expect, a large sneak attack, probably a suicidal one as well, on Tinian. We had already had three alerts, all false alarms but all still disturbing.

Another rumor was that the Japs had promised to execute all the members of the U. S. Army Air Forces they held as prisoners. This would be in retaliation for the "bestial cruelty of the Americans" in dropping the two bombs. I never did find out if such a threat had actually been made, but it worried me. I thought of the returned prisoner of war I'd met back in the States and his stories of life in a PW camp. And the rumored Jap threat continued to bother me. I wouldn't have wanted to be responsible for such ex-

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ecutions, and I couldn't have helped it anyway. When we dropped the bomb, we were under orders; otherwise, we wouldn't have done it. That relieved me, relieved the entire crew of responsibility, didn't it? I wanted to think so, and, at times, I convinced myself that it did. But I wasn't sure enough for comfort.

In the afternoon, we attended a lengthy, dull and completely nonsensical briefing on air-sea rescue; nonsensical because we wouldn't be needing that kind of knowledge any more; we'd flown our last mission, of that I was certain. This was just a way of taking up two hours of our time. I estimate I spent fifty percent, half or more, of my three years in the Army listening to lectures or doing jobs that were unnecessary because they came too early, too late or were useless. Fifty percent or more of my time; that's a year and a half of my life. A very long time.

After the lecture, we hurried back to our hut and dressed in Class A uniforms. We were to be decorated.

The members of Colonel Tibbets' crew received the Distinguished Flying Cross for dropping the Hiroshima bomb; we got a lengthy speech—and an Air Medal each, for flying right wing on the mission. And we shook hands all around and had our pictures taken.

"I once knew a man who had a medal he deserved," said Ray on our way back to the hut. "He was a little crazy, though."

"I once knew an Air Corps general who didn't have any medals at all," added Buckley. "He was a brigadier."

No one in the Air Forces takes medals very seriously. There are too many of them, and more times than not they're given to the wrong people.

That night we did absolutely nothing. There was no liquor available, not even any beer, and we were too exhausted to play cards. We just lay on our bunks, sporadically saying a sentence or two, still listening to the rumors on the radio.

Once Ray broke a long silence with, "You know, I keep wondering what a 'gimmick' would do to Chicago. . . . Say just one of them, let go some place along La Salle Street."

"For God's sake, stop worrying," said "Pappy." "Nobody knows how to make them except us, and we aren't going to start blowing each other up. Not for awhile anyway."

"But that scientist we talked to the other night said the Germans almost found out, and that sooner or later everybody could make them," Ray added.

"Who the hell cares?" Kuharek wanted to know. "And why worry, anyway?"

"I care," said Ray, shortly and a little sharply, "and I'm worried."

A few more minutes of silence; then Ray spoke again.

"Right in the middle of the loop," he said. "One of those things could do a lot of damage right in the middle of the loop."

No one had an answer this time, because we couldn't think of anything to say. Me, I was thinking somewhat similar thoughts; I was wondering what a "gimmick" would do if dropped in the middle of Times Square. But, then, I thought, who'd drop it? And, besides, the war's over, isn't it? But always in the back of my mind I kept remembering all the people, including soldiers, many soldiers, who kept asking, "When are we going to fight the Russians?" And expected an answer.

One by one, we dropped off to sleep, with the lights still blazing and the radio still going full blast. The last words I heard were from a sleepy-voiced announcer who said, "Here in Washington we are still awaiting official confirmation of the rumored surrender offer." . . . Still waiting, waiting, waiting. I dropped off to sleep. . . .

. . . It was a peculiar room. It looked something like our own combat room, except that the walls were painted a bright red, and there was no roof. Instead, the open sky was overhead, a sky without any clouds at all and with stars at least twice their usual size. The officer who was giving us the briefing looked vaguely familiar. He was a lieutenant colonel, as was our own intelligence officer; only this one had silver leaves that covered both shoulders and looked as if they were imbedded with diamonds. And one other matter, a small detail that it took me some time to observe. This particular intelligence officer had no face, no nose, mouth, eyes. Not a single feature. Just blank space where his face should have been. . . .

. . . As I looked around me, I saw that the same was true of everyone else in the room. Except for our own crew. They were all there, looking tense and worried as they had when we went to the Hiroshima briefing. And, although I didn't notice it, the room seemed to be very warm. Albury was perspiring; so was Van Pelt, who sat on the edge of the bench next to Major Sweeney. Olivi and Beahan had removed their shirts, probably because of the heat, I thought. . . . Conduct very unbecoming to officers; some of the brass—there were a lot of generals in the room, all of whose stars were of the same size and shape and texture as those in the sky and all of which were dazzlingly, overwhelmingly bright—would undoubtedly speak to them about the matter. Ray was next to me, then Kuharek, Buckley, Dehart and Olivi. . . .

. . . "Destination unknown," Ray whispered. "Guess the destination. Destination, guess." And he giggled foolishly and wiped huge beads of sweat from his forehead. . . .

. . . "These are the intelligence photos," the lieutenant colonel began, speaking in a very high-pitched voice, and his words pouring out all at once. He pushed a button, and all the lights in the room were extinguished, but there was plenty of illumination, nevertheless; the stars furnished that, the stars in the sky and on the shoulders of the generals, and the lieutenant colonel's silver leaves shone like neon lights. A screen was lowered with the push of another button, followed by a beam from a projection booth somewhere far in the background. The beam was bright red and reflected on the red of the walls. . . .

. . . The pictures themselves were huge, but they looked like the aerial photos of any city, a port city, apparently, and a large one. There was water, and there were bridges and dots indicating houses, and parks, and wide paved highways. A modern city, I thought. Must not be in Japan, much too modern for Japan and too large, much too large unless it's Tokyo. I've never seen a picture of Tokyo taken from the air. . . .

. . . "You needn't worry about the exact target," the lieutenant colonel was saying, and laughing at the same time. Laughing very hard. "This new bomb, 'Big Boy' we call it, is larger than the other two. It's at least four times as destructive as the bomb you dropped on Nagasaki. And much, much better. . . .

. . . "More destructive, I mean, much more destructive." And he laughed again, almost maniacally. . . . Then he pushed another button, and a second picture flashed on the screen. It was even larger than the first, and the details were even clearer. This was a modern city. Looked almost like an American city, one of the largest American cities. I stared at the picture, fascinated. . . .

. . . "You will drop the bomb at 12:01," the lieutenant colonel continued. "On the minute. On the nose. That will be the lunch hour; people will just be going out to lunch. That is *why* you will drop the bomb at that moment." More laughter. All the faceless men in the room were laughing; everyone was having a wonderful time, except us, the crew of *The Great Artiste.*

. . . "The bomb will, undoubtedly wipe out the entire city," the lieutenant colonel went on. "In less than one tenth of a second. Very little time, no time at all, to speak of." . . .

. . . The lieutenant colonel paused. He seemed to be a little nervous, and his hand wiped a non-existent brow. . . .

. . . "What about Van Cortlandt?" asked someone in the back of the room. "And Pelham Bay?" I tensed forward; I'd misunderstood, of course. Just a foolish misunderstanding. . . .

. . ."Van Cortlandt Park, you mean?" the lieutenant colonel asked. "Nothing much. Don't worry about the parks. The grass will be seared. Any inhabitants present there at the moment will, of course, be injured, perhaps killed. But don't worry.". . .

. . . "You're crazy, Spitzer," I told myself. "This is some place else they're talking about, some other city with parks of the same name. Don't be silly, Spitzer." . . .

. . . "Are there any questions?" the lieutenant colonel asked, reaching into his pocket, taking out a handkerchief and brushing his neon-light silver leaves. "Everybody clear?". . .

. . . I opened my mouth but no sound emerged. Again, still no sound. I strained; my throat was dry; I swallowed, but there was no saliva. I raised my hand, frantically waving it at the lieutenant colonel; he looked my way and nodded. . . .

. . . "Yes?" Obviously he was annoyed. "Yes? A question?" . . .

. . . Finally, a word came out; it wasn't in my voice, but I was speaking; I could tell I was speaking because my mouth opened and closed. "The target?" I asked. "What's the target?" . . .

. . . The lieutenant colonel appeared to be smiling; only, since he had no lips you couldn't be sure. "The target," he said, smugly, and with an air of self-satisfaction. "The target is the Bronx, New York." . . .

. . . I jumped to my feet. "No," I shouted, loud and firm and strong. My voice had returned. "No!" Our entire crew began shouting; I couldn't understand what they were saying; their voices ran together, and no words were distinguishable. "No!" I shouted again. "No!". . .

. . . The lieutenant colonel again appeared to be smiling. "Perhaps you don't understand," he said, his voice silken and smooth. "You're in the Army, sergeant. This is the Army, Sergeant Spitzer.". . .

. . . "No," I shouted again. "No, I won't." . . .

. . . "That's an order, sergeant.". . .

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. . . Everyone in the room nodded, all the faceless men. "That's an order, sergeant," they said, in unison, the generals with their bright stars speaking louder than the rest. . . .

. . . The lights in the room were turned on, and Ray was shouting at me. What he said made no sense at all. "Hey, get up," he was saying. "The war's over." . . .

. . . I was fully awake now, and in our hut and in my bunk, and it had been a nightmare, of course, naturally. I'd never had a nightmare like it, and, please God, never will again.

Ray was wrong. It wasn't the surrender. It was merely an announcement that we were willing to accept Japan's surrender only if the emperor took orders from us. The war, then, was still going on. I went back to bed, and this time I slept soundly.

The next day we were famous. We had a press conference, and we told our stories, and there was a broadcast, and we had more pictures taken. I thought it was fun, then, and important. I continued to think so until after my discharge.

But I was wrong. Nobody knew. Nobody seemed to care, about the crew, about the raids on Hiroshima and Nagasaki or about the atomic bombs. Nobody back home in the States even bothered to understand the bomb.

The rest of that day and the next we only waited. We were warned that there might be a sneak attack, and we were alerted. The waiting was for both, the sneak attack and the surrender. Neither happened.

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It was, "Hurry up and wait" again. If there was a slogan for war, that would be it. It couldn't be improved on. That, in a sentence, is the story of the Army, all armies, I suppose, and all wars. "Hurry up and wait."

On August 13, more decorations. A silver star for Major Sweeney, for the Nagasaki raid; for Beahan and Commander Ashworth, the DFC, for the rest of us a cluster for our Air Medal. We smiled again, real pretty, for the cameras, and everyone shook our hands, and we felt like monkeys in a cage, performing for peanuts. Peanuts, nothing more.

And in the evening, we were told, unofficially, that if the surrender didn't come that night, there'd be another mission. Maybe.

There was no news of the surrender.

Chapter Fourteen

SOMEONE was shaking my shoulder. It was still dark, but all the lights were on, and almost everyone in the hut was already half-dressed. It was 0530 by my watch.

"For God's sake," I said, "let's get some sleep."

Ray shook me again.

"Wake up, Abe," he said. "There's a strike going out; briefing at 0600." I said things as I reached for my shoes and socks, many things. I questioned the ancestry of all Japanese, living and dead; I damned and

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double-damned the U. S. Army, the Air Corps, the 393rd Squadron, the 509th Group, all commissioned officers, with special emphasis on those responsible for this particular mission, and I goddamned anybody who would wake up anyone else at 0530 in the morning. I said all this aloud, and I had company.

I had had my third cup of coffee before I uttered a pleasant word to anybody. "I hope we blast the bastards off the face of the earth," I said, and at that particular moment, I meant it.

The briefing room was crowded this time; this was to be no three-plane mission. It was to be the greatest air-sea blast in history, with hundreds of planes—no one knew how many; planes were to take off not only from Tinian but from bomber bases all over the Pacific, and to be supplemented by a surface fleet that would strike along the entire coast of Japan.

Our own target was the town of Koromo, and we were, this time, to carry an ordinary bomb load of TNT, no atomic bombs this time, just the usual, what then seemed, what still seems only a drop of death. The equivalent of a bow and arrow against massed artillery. Only the comparison is inept, not nearly vivid or descriptive enough. A real comparison cannot understandably be made.

Take-off was to be at 0935; the weather would be good, and so would the enemy opposition—good and strong. Fighter and flak might and should both be expected. And, yes, one thing more. We were to stand by for the word "Utah," all of us. That would mean, "Return to your base." It would also mean that the war was over, and we were to abort, dropping the bomb anywhere in the Pacific we damn pleased. And that would be a pleasure, sir, a great pleasure.

The preliminaries before take-off were routine now. Engines started at 0919, taxi out at 0927, in the air at 0935 . . . Routine, dull. Our sixth trip to the Empire, our fifth combat mission, but compared to the two that had come before, nothing at all. Regular bombs were nothing now, nothing much for any of us to worry about, including the Japs, and all our planes, all our ships, all our guns, all our ammunition, all our combined strength, would do less harm, by far, than *The Great Artiste* had done on August 9 with its one bomb, than the *Enola Gay* had done on August 6 with what dropped from its bomb bays at the proper signal. That was not a thing to be said to the men on the other ships, or even, then, to talk about too much among ourselves, but it was true, and still is.

"This is going to be like playing soldier," Ray said once, after we were in the air and Beahan was working over that ordinary, workaday bomb.

"I know, I know," the captain replied. "This is boy's stuff; this is for the Scouts. I thought they were saving us for the men's work."

"I hear they've got some more of the atomic babies ready in case this doesn't do the trick," Buckley added.

"Yeah," said Ray, "just in case it's needed.". . . Then, after thinking, thinking what I could imagine, "But if there's any more of that hot stuff to be dropped, I think they ought to let someone else have the experience. I don't think it'd be fair for us to hog all the glory, do you, fellows?"

"No," I answered, sardonically. "We'd be glad to do it, but it just wouldn't be fair for us to have all the breaks. I'll willingly let somebody else do it; I'm no pig; I'll not mind letting someone else get famous, a little famous, anyway."

As a matter of fact, I understood later, we weren't quite ready to drop another bomb, not at that exact time anyway; although that's a rumor, neither confirmed nor denied, one of the many details about our two raids that's still "Top Secret." Why, I don't know; it's a matter that couldn't conceivably be of any interest to anyone except the Japs, but, still and all, even now, months after the end of the war, those who know the answer can't talk about it. It's "Confidential." The reasons, if someone could find them out, might make another book, a much more interesting, perhaps much longer book than this one.

Our trip to Koromo was simple and easy, and, I might add, must add, the most frightening of the war, for me at least. And, although this was a thing none of us in the crew mentioned, to the others as well. You could tell; it was in the atmosphere.

It's difficult to explain the reason, except that we, all of us, knew that the war was so nearly ended, that we'd had our two tough missions—there couldn't be any tougher than those to Hiroshima and Nagasaki—that we'd really succeeded in knocking them out, that now it was merely a matter of doing a little more waiting. Nobody wants to die, ever, of course, but especially nobody wants to die during the last hours of a war. And I kept remembering all the stories of the handful of soldiers in Europe who'd been killed the day of and days after V-E Day. And how useless and futile and ironic their deaths had been. And, to repeat, I was afraid. No single death can have meaning when there's a war on, but it can, at least, have purpose. There's a difference, and if, I thought, if any one of us were to be shot down now, if our plane were to be hit by flak, were to be in a battle with a Jap fighter, if only one of us would be wounded, it would be without purpose. Because the enemy was finished, down and out and not even gasping for more breath, not even able, apparently, to get out the word, "Uncle." Frankly, I thought our mission was unnecessary, but then, of course, that was none of my business. As a sergeant told my class of recruits during basic training, "Enlisted men aren't paid to think." And, for the most part, that's true. Enlisted men are paid to do their jobs and keep their mouths shut and, if they can keep their minds closed, that helps, too. Sometimes it's impossible, but it does no harm at all to do no thinking. I always found the sergeant's hint very helpful.

We reached our target at 1545, and there were clouds in the sky, and the radar wasn't working well. It was up to Beahan to lay it in—and the first time. At 1550, he had the target in the sight; it looked good. The bomb bay doors opened. "Pappy" reported a few bursts of flak, and, although they were out of range, the old, cold, chilly, pre-drop feeling returned. I couldn't see the bursts, but I knew they were there, and I felt them coming our way, in my imagination, anyway, which is the worst way.

Beahan dropped the egg at 1553, then swore long and violently.

"Son of a bitch," he said, "I guess I've forgotten how to handle this kid stuff. I guess I'm no good at the little jobs any more; I'd better just handle the McCoy."

Of course, the results would, inevitably, have been disappointing after Hiroshima and Nagasaki. From where we were, it looked as if we'd pelted the city below with bean shooters. It seemed as if we'd done nothing at all; we'd flown all this way and risked our necks for no visible result. No columns of smoke, no blazing

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balls of fire, no instant impact of giant explosion. Just a few buildings destroyed, one or two or half a dozen (we couldn't tell), maybe a score of people killed, maybe even a hundred, maybe, in all the areas where bombs were being dropped and the giant naval guns being fired, a few thousand, what was that? All that money and all that time and all that risk for less result than we'd achieved in less than one-tenth of a second? At Hiroshima and at Nagasaki both.

Some people are still talking about fighting the next war with huge land armies and huge navies and huge, traditional, very traditional air forces. But no one who was with us and who saw, from above or below, what happened when the A-bomb was dropped is talking that way. Unless he's got something to sell, that is, unless he's got an angle. I haven't got an angle, unless, perhaps, it's to try to keep the world from committing mass suicide. But that's a difficult angle to get on the market, and it seems to take a long time to find any buyers.

We got out easily, followed by a few more bursts of flak that were still out of range, and during the eleven-hour trip back to base, all of us strained at the radio, waiting for a certain word, a certain four-letter, not necessarily Anglo-Saxon word. "Utah" was the word we wanted to hear, "Utah," meaning, "It's all over, boys; they've thrown in the sponge, and we caught it, and it's a very large sponge." "Utah," meaning the Japs have given up. "Utah." Just once.

But the word never arrived, and when we'd landed and after the routine interrogation in which nobody seemed much interested, even the interrogation officers, there was still no word of surrender. About the only news of any importance was the fact that in the briefing room were two creatures I vaguely recognized as girls, American girls, Red Cross girls, serving doughnuts. We looked at them and whistled and said the usual things in the usual ways, then added, bitterly maybe, but realistically certainly, "Officer stuff. Off limits to enlisted men. Strictly for the brass." Bitter? Maybe. But true. All enlisted men, former and present, will understand; no one else will.

That night everybody on the island who could find a bottle got as drunk as the liquor available would allow. And, in our case, that was quite drunk, really very intoxicated. We kept the radio on, and we listened, between drinks, not very hopefully. There were rumors from Washington and more rumors from Tokyo, and word, unofficially, from Switzerland of an unofficial surrender offer, and more talk about more atomic bombs being dropped. The latter we paid no attention to at all, no visible attention anyway; that we ignored. We wouldn't even admit the possibility of that last.

I hardly remember stumbling back to our hut and taking a shower, first hot, then cold, then hot again. I do recall, earlier in the evening, thinking I'd been drinking too much lately and that I'd have to stop.

But I went right on drinking. And, I thought, I'll keep drinking, every night, every goddamned day until the goddamned war ends. I'd never understood before why people wanted to drink, but I did then. There are certain things you want to forget and to ignore and not to think about, for a few hours, for a few glorious, forgetful hours, and even the next morning, that's fine, too. So you have a hangover; so your head aches; that's fine; that's dandy. You can concentrate on that instead of what you want to forget.

The next morning, I had some washing to do, some shorts and undershirts and socks, and, as usual, as you do when you're living like a primitive man—which you do at a faraway Pacific base; we did at Tinian, anyway —I did my own washing, with hand soap, in the wash bowl. I didn't get anything clean, but that didn't matter. It was the idea of going through the motions that counted, that and nothing else.

I was hanging the tattle-tale grey clothes on the line outside the hut. It was 9 A.M.—Tinian time—when the announcer began, in which words, I don't remember; his exact phrases I couldn't have repeated ten seconds later. It was the idea that counted; that was all that mattered.

The war was over. Japan had surrendered.

I'd thought a lot about what I'd do when I heard that news. I'd run and scream and yell. I'd pat people on the back; I'd jump up and down; I'd laugh and shout.

I understand people back in the States did all those things when they heard, when they knew, finally, that the organized killing and dying were ended, were over, at least for awhile. It then looked like, and I still hope, and prayerfully believe, that it was forever.

But I did none of these things. I did nothing at all for several moments, several long, calm moments. I continued hanging up my only half-clean clothes. And I was not alone. There was not much shouting; there was very little celebrating on Tinian right then. It took awhile for the news to sink in.

And there must have been many who, like me, had trouble focusing their eyes for awhile. There must have been thousands all over the Pacific, wearing OD's and khaki and Navy blues and Marine green, who found things swimming before them. And who couldn't forget, even for a minute, even for a second, all the others who didn't hear the news, who would never hear the news, would never know, had died believing the day would come but couldn't be sure. And who, in dying, didn't ask for written guarantees, died for a reason they didn't exactly understand because nobody had ever bothered to tell them. Died for all the trite but meaningful words people say on the Fourth of July and on other occasions of the year and at other times when patriotism pays. Died when patriotism didn't pay at all. Died believing, never being sure but believing that someone else would collect the dividends.

And if all that sounds like an oration, if it seems to be something you just put down on a piece of paper because it seems like a good idea, because it's expected, it isn't. Not in my case it isn't. Not in the cases of any of the solemn men I saw on Tinian that day, all the men with memories.

Except for the radio, the hut was almost quiet when I went inside. Men seemed to be standing or sitting or lying where they had been when they had first heard the news.

Ray reached over and took my hand and shook it very hard.

"You happy, Abe?" he asked, half-laughing but his voice breaking at the same time.

"Yeah," I said. "I'm happy."

"So'm I," he answered. "Only I'm not happy like I thought I'd be. It's not like I thought it'd be at all. You know what I mean?"

"Yeah. I know what you mean." And I did.

Chapter Fifteen

LATER in the day, of course, after those first solemn minutes, maybe only seconds, there was shouting. Sirens wailed, and the sound made you shudder for an instant, until you realized; it didn't mean an alert any more; it wasn't warning us of a raid; it would never mean that any more. Whistles blew, and trucks and jeeps sped along the roads with hands glued to the horns, and there were greetings; everyone greeted everyone else, friends and enemies, acquaintances and strangers. And everyone called everyone else "Mr;" it was no longer "corporal" or "sergeant" or "sir." It was "mister," all the time "mister," "mister" from here on in. Radios were on continuously, in all the huts, all the mess halls, everywhere. From Washington came news, from New York long descriptions of the crowds in Times Square—and I kept wondering if Esta were there and being sure, being damned sure for the first time, that we'd be there together come New Year's Eve, as we had been so many times for so many years before. And the warning that this wasn't officially V-J Day, that no one must think it was, that it wouldn't be until the President officially proclaimed that the war had ended, that peace terms were officially signed. But nobody cared about that; nobody gave a single good goddamn.

That evening Colonel Tibbets called us together, and I don't think I ever saw a happier man, even though I'd seen a lot of happy men that day. "Well," he said, "I don't want to say I told you so, but, by God, I did tell you so. I said our 'gimmick' would end the war six months earlier, and it did, didn't it? Nobody can deny now that it did." He emphasized the word *now,* and I could imagine that during the long months of the tests, the dragging weeks when what the bomb would do was only a hope, the colonel had had lots of arguments with lots of brass who didn't believe the "gimmick" would do what he said, what he and the scientists said. High brass is not known for being over-imaginative.

The colonel, his face a little flushed, began immediately with what was the big news for us, the news that was almost as important as the fact that the war had ended. "I'm going to Washington in a few days," he said, "and I'm going to ask, to demand that the entire 509th be returned to the States intact."

"Yipee," we shouted, and he didn't call for order, "Yipee." And more and similar shouts that lasted for several minutes.

"Three cheers for the colonel," shouted someone, and we cheered him all right. He was a hero, all right, when he said that; he was a hero anyway, for my money, not the kind the newspapers talk about maybe, a hero who had faith in an idea and who sweated out the results of that idea. And succeeded.

"Don't be too optimistic, though," he added. "It may not work. Somebody may say no. You know the Army."

We guffawed; we knew the Army; you couldn't have found a man in the room who wasn't well-acquainted with the Army, better acquainted than, if he'd have had

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the choice, he'd have liked to be. Except for a few, naturally. Except for a few like Kuharek. And, at that minute, he'd probably have taken a discharge along with the rest of us if someone had offered it to him.

Then the colonel continued. One of the principal reasons he wanted to bring the entire group back together was that he planned to try to build up a post-war organization capable of handling the atomic project.

Naturally, he included us in those plans. Naturally. Of course. Sure. Well, I liked the colonel all right. I liked the colonel very much indeed, and I was fond of Sweeney and Beahan and Kuharek and all the others in the outfit who wanted to make the Army a nice long career. And I'm still fond of them; they're fine. The Army's fine, and so is castor oil, if you like castor oil. I happen not to care much about either.

After the meeting, we returned to the hut and sat around in the barracks and batted the breeze, mentioning what we'd do the day we got back, saying how thick a steak we'd order, pointing out the kind of civilian suit we'd prefer, speculating on how many days it would be. Or weeks. Or months. Not being too optimistic.

"I'll just keep planning on a little occupation duty," said Ray. "I'll expect the worst; then whatever happens will be a pleasant surprise." Ray had the right idea; we agreed, all of us.

No one said much about the colonel's post-war plans, except to point out that those were the colonel's plans, and we'd take a rain check, thanks, thanks very much indeed.

That night I wrote how I felt in my diary. The thoughts aren't particularly well-expressed, I suppose, but I meant them. And I haven't changed my mind.

"The colonel has some ideas about building up a

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post-war organization," I wrote. "That's fine for the colonel. I wish him every success. But not for me. When this boy gets his feet on U. S. soil, he has a few other ideas. It doesn't take a genius to flip a radio switch up and down. Besides, this particular sergeant —who prefers the title of "Mr." anyway—would rather monkey with a radio in his parlor than the one on a B-29. Anyway, I'm no genius, never have been and never plan to be. My wants are very simple. I want to become a civilian, real fast, quick like a flash I want to become a civilian. I've been married to the Army for three years now, listening to its nagging, taking its orders, smiling at guys I'd rather slug, saluting men I don't consider my superiors, sometimes not even my equals. Now I want a divorce; I want to go home. I'd rather listen to my wife's nagging than the Army's. She nags better—and not nearly so often."

I could paste those words in my hat, any time, any place. And if I did, I'd never change the hat because I wouldn't want to lose track of the words.

The days after August 15 were long and dull and meaningless. And there was nothing to do except circulate rumors; so we took care of that. Within a few hours, we'd hear that we were going to be moved to the Philippines, that we'd fly to the Empire, that we'd carry supplies on shuttle-missions across the Pacific, that we'd return prisoners of war to the States.

Once, for the hell of it and to test the authenticity of the rumors we'd already heard, we planted a rumor in the mess hall that the 509th would drop one atomic bomb on Tokyo, just to hurry up the official surrender, to cut down on the waiting time.

Within half an hour, somebody ran into the hut to pass on the news that the 509th would drop bombs on half a dozen Jap cities, that hostilities had begun again, that the plan was to wipe out the entire Empire. For days afterward, the rumor came back to us, in one form or another, always a little bit bigger than before, always just a little more different than the one we'd planted.

On August 18, we had something to do, thank God. We had a two-hour local flight. Operations required that we have four hours in the air every week, peace or no, reasonable or not, and that day we flew in a three-plane close formation, and we didn't like it much, didn't approve at all, in fact. Our squadron had never been trained to fly formation and never had, and already that week three planes had cracked up on the local flights.

I need hardly add that, although the crew was unanimously against the idea, we flew anyway.

The days passed, more flights, more waiting, more black jack and poker games, more rumors, more, always more waiting. And, on September 1, a lecture about military courtesy; that was important now, suddenly again, and, oh, yes, one thing more. On the third, new uniform regulations would be in effect. Formal, Class A uniforms would be worn at all times, pressed and clean and uncomfortable. No more trousers cut off just below the crotch, no more shirts with the sleeves half hacked away, no more wearing the sensible thing. It was the formal thing from here on in; the peacetime Army was rearing its not-very-attractive head.

But there was also good news on the first. We were told that it was certain—as certain as anything in the Army can be—that we'd be in the States, back in God's country, please, back in the land of steaks and milk and fresh eggs and white women and blue serge suits, by November 15.

That day could be marked on the calendar, and knowing that, having a day to shoot for, to look forward to, made life reasonably bearable.

We listened to the official V-J ceremony on the radio, and it was colorful, I guess, and General MacArthur made a good speech, I guess, and there was a final, sincere sigh of relief by all of us. No celebrating, just a sigh of relief that after three years, eight months and twenty-six days, there was, finally and officially, peace.

I remember one thing as we listened while the representatives of each of the nations marched across the deck of the *Missouri* and up to the table to sign the official surrender.

It was Ray, with youth and optimism in his voice, who said, "Well, I guess that winds up the last war, in our time anyway." And he looked around for agreement.

After a pause, quite a lengthy pause, Buckley answered. "I wouldn't want to swear to it," he said. "I wouldn't want to raise my right hand on that one."

At the time, I was more inclined to side with Ray; later, listening to what people are saying back home, reading the newspapers, listening to the speeches, I've been less sure, every day less sure.

I wouldn't want to take any oaths myself right now.

We left for the States on November 5, flying with twenty men aboard, the regular combat crew plus ten passengers, including our ground crew.

We took off at midnight, going down the runway as we had before, on our missions, only this time there was no planned destruction ahead, only home. As we lifted into the air, I looked down and back, just once. There were lights below and people, many of them friends, and memories, many memories of all the days since the June previous when we'd arrived. But I had no regrets at leaving Tinian, and I won't mind if I never see it again, ever. For that matter, I wouldn't mind if I never saw the Pacific ocean again. It's a nice body of water, but I won't miss it any, and I'm sure it won't miss me.

Our first stop, just six hours later, was at the ugly, flat, treeless narrow coral island of Kwajalein, an air field, a few barracks and sand, nothing else. We didn't stay long, just long enough for a few of the men to come up to look at us, a few curiously—because they'd heard we were the atom-bomb men—but more enviously. We were going home, weren't we?

We lost the day we'd gained on our way out when we crossed the date-line between Kwajalein and John Rogers Field on Oahu, but we didn't mind. Nobody minded anything then. We were going home, weren't we?

We stayed one night in Honolulu, and the next morning were off again, only ten or eleven hours now, depending on the weather. No time at all, really, and nobody minded that there was nothing to see except water, miles of it, hours of it, and nobody cared that we were crowded close together and hungry and uncomfortable. All that didn't mean a thing. We were going home, weren't we?

"It won't be long now, fellows," I called into the interphones.

"Say it again," said Buckley, "say it several times again."

And I did.

I was busy during the flight from Honolulu to San Francisco, sending, every few minutes, the report on our position to the ground station. But in the odd moments between reports, I could look around me, at the faces of the men who'd flown the missions to Hiroshima and Nagasaki—and the men of the ground crew who'd made both flights possible.

It had been only a little more than four months since we'd left the States, but all of us were more than four months older. I don't know what it was that I saw in those faces—a certain hardness, I think, but, more important, a sadness, too. The hardness I can understand. We'd had a difficult four months; we'd had fewer missions than most, and we hadn't been overseas long, not really, not compared to the twenty-eight, the thirty and the thirty-five mission men, not compared to the three and four years of hundreds of thousands of others.

And, actually, missions are all pretty much the same; you sweat them out, whether they're large or small, whether you've a new bomb you know nothing about or an ordinary, regular bomb, the kind that have been used hundreds of times before. Flak and the fighters don't know what you've got aboard.

If our faces, then, were any different from those of other returning veterans, it was because of what we'd seen, what we'd witnessed in only a very few moments, once over Hiroshima, again over Nagasaki. It was that we knew, first hand, what one bomb could do, and what we knew we could never satisfactorily explain to anyone else. I know; I've tried, and so have the others.

The weather had been good most of the way back, but just off the coast, we ran into fog, flying at 11,000 feet, not being able to get above it—or below. The bridge wasn't visible at first, and all of us were strained at the windows, looking, wanting that first view.

Then we started our descent, and as we came out of the clouds at 5,000 feet, that magnificent, wonderful, beautiful Golden Gate bridge was below, the sun shining straight down on it and the water of the bay the bluest water in the world.

It was Buckley who shouted first, and his words weren't exactly poetic. "I'll be damned," he said, his voice dropping to a whisper, "I'll be damned. Look at that." We looked, and we shouted, and we patted each other on the back, and we circled several times before we landed.

And when we stepped off the plane, there was nobody there to meet us; nobody cared; there were so many planes flying in from the Pacific. And no one got out and kissed the ground, the way they do in the movies.

We just stood outside the plane, the crew of *The Great Artiste,* Sweeney, Albury, Van Pelt, Olivi and Beahan, "Nails," "Buck," Ray, "Pappy," and I. And if someone had had a pin and had dropped it, you could have heard the sound.

Then a sergeant came up, an elderly sergeant wearing half a dozen overseas stripes. "You guys better get the lead out and start through the processing," he said, kindly, as if he understood how we felt and was sorry to break it up but those were his orders.

"Yes," said Ray, "I guess we better get the lead out." And we started across the air field toward the huge hangar.

A slight breeze was blowing, and the sun was beating down, but it wasn't a hot sun; it was a warm, friendly sun, and the sky was a color you never see in the Pacific, a light, kind of peacock blue.

When we walked inside the hangar, a young captain wearing glasses and a good conduct medal and a pre-Pearl Harbor ribbon shouted at us, "You guys better hurry the hell up," he shouted. "We haven't got all day."

"I guess we're back," said Buckley. "I can tell by the tone of voice."

And that was really the end of it. The days before my discharge went quickly and were unimportant. Nothing really mattered, now that I was home.

The night before I received the little pin for my lapel, the pin that looks like gold but isn't and is worth much more to any one of us, we did a little friendly drinking, not much, just enough to loosen our tongues and bring back certain memories.

I remember what everyone said that night as we were discussing Nagasaki, and I think I'll always remember it.

"The part that got me most," Ray commented, "was when I saw that ball of fire. I guess I can tell you now, and you won't laugh, but I thought maybe the world had come to an end, and we'd caused it."

"I can't forget that pillar of smoke," said Buckley, "reaching all the way up and not getting any place, not ever getting to the top of the sky, and I kept wondering if it would ever stop. And I wouldn't want to be too sure it ever did."

"Funny," added "Pappy," "I couldn't help thinking about the people who'd been living in those houses down there. They never knew what hit them. I knew they were Japs, of course, and you don't think much about Japs. They're your enemies and all. But I kept thinking about that, and I still do. I guess I always will."

"I just thought about maybe I should have stayed in the tank outfit," said Kuharek. "That's a nice, clean way to kill people. If it's all right to kill people, that's a nice, clean way to do it. I mean then they can fight back."

I didn't say much, beyond what I've said here, at least, but now, thinking over the conversation of that evening, it seems to me Ray said it best.

" . . . I thought maybe the world had come to an end, and we'd caused it."

Well, a world did come to an end, although we hadn't caused it. We were under orders; we were just doing our job. And I don't think Ray meant it in exactly the way I do, but he was close enough. And that's what I've been trying to tell people ever since, not very successfully; some people don't listen, and some people don't care, and hardly anyone, including me, knows exactly what to do about the fact. All I know is that it's about time we found out.

And I also know that I agree with the scientist back at Tinian who, when asked how he felt about his part in making the bomb, said, "I'm not proud of myself right now." Neither am I.

The missions to Hiroshima and Nagasaki are nothing to be proud of at all. But they are missions to be remembered. And never repeated. Anywhere in the world. Ever again.

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